Computer active

ISSUE 719 | 24 SEPT – 7 OCT 2025

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Advertising Manager Alexandra Thomas
Subscriptions Sarah Lowry, Henry Massey
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From the Editor

I used to suffer from mouse finger, caused by too much scrolling. That's now been replaced by remote thumb, the result of flicking through endless channels on my TV looking for something half-decent to watch. In fact, most evenings I'd gladly settle for quarter-decent.

My prospects have been improved after reading Robert Irvine's superb Cover Feature on the best new TV apps. It's a channel-hopping tour of Hollywood blockbusters, vintage shows, easy entertainment and classic British movies ("Once more unto the breach, dear friends..."). Though the fantastic Radioplayer app (page 55) means I'll probably spend just as much time *listening* to my TV as watching it.

I hope Robert's tips help solve the paradox of too much choice – where you're so overwhelmed by what's available that you keep flicking until your brain melts. Or perhaps that's just me. I don't want to go back to the days of only four channels (and I know some of you remember when there were just two), but you can have too much of a good thing.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

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Size of the thinnest-ever iPhone – *p7*

£26.99
How much Robert Irvine paid to create a smart light switch at home – *p74*

147 million
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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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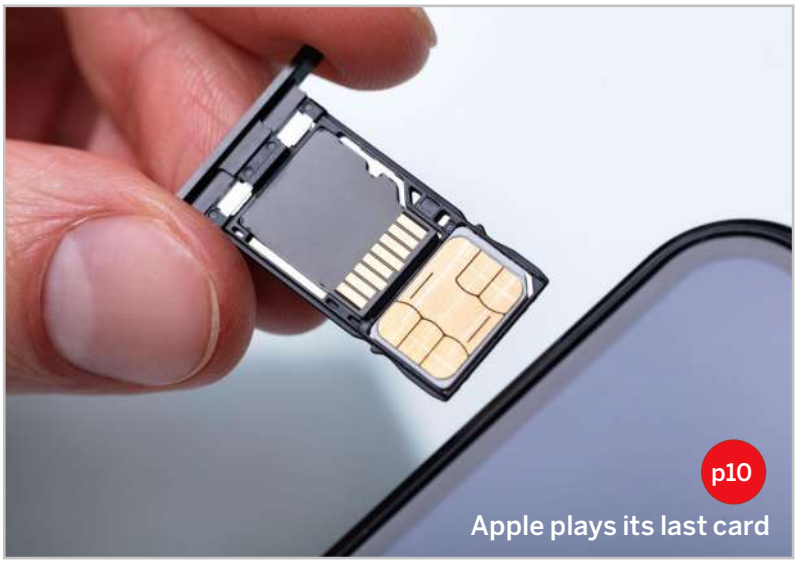

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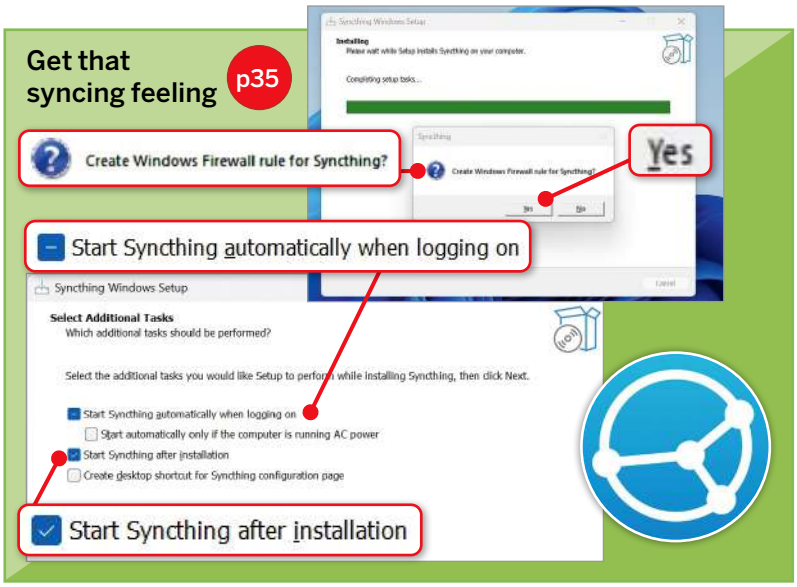

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Tor launches its first VPN app but warns of bugs

Tor has launched a VPN app for Android phones and tablets, though it's a beta version and users should "expect bugs".

Until now, the only way to use Tor was through its browser (www.torproject.org). This hides your identity by connecting you to the web through multiple volunteer servers, called nodes, and encrypts what you visit.

This is different to VPNs, which connect you through one of their own servers rather than several run by volunteers.

Tor's browser is therefore more private than VPNs, but browsing the web can be slower because it connects you through multiple servers.

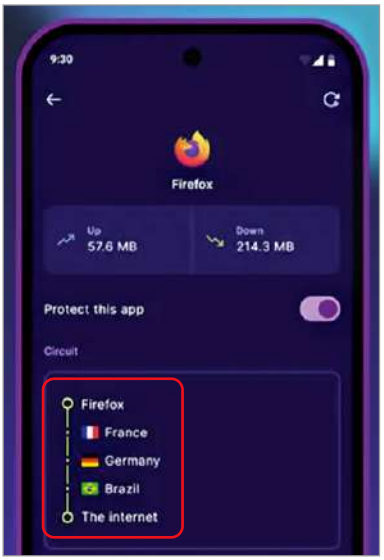
Also, it encrypts only what happens in the browser, rather than all the data your device sends and receives.

But Tor's VPN aims to combine the advantages of both, hiding your real IP address and location like a traditional VPN, while encrypting and sending the internet activity of selected apps through multiple volunteer nodes.

The app shows which nodes you're being connected through, such as in our screenshot where traffic from Firefox is sent to a node in France, then Germany, then Brazil, before connecting to the internet.

It has split tunneling, letting you pick sensitive apps you want to be encrypted while keeping less sensitive apps unencrypted and connected to the web without passing through a VPN. The fewer apps you have encrypted, the faster your browsing will be.

Tor says each app has its own "circuit and exit IP", meaning all your online activities are kept separate. For example, anyone trying to monitor your internet connections wouldn't be able to tell that the messages you send in WhatsApp come from the same device or account as the posts you make on Facebook.



The app is available on the Google Play Store at www.snipca.com/56286.

WHAT WE THINK

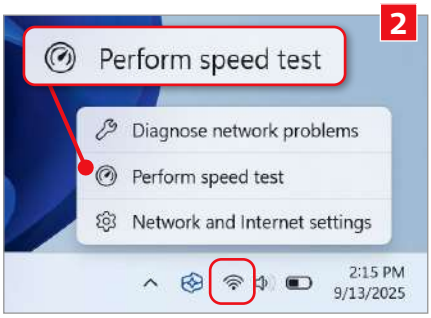
This is a low-key launch, but it's one of the most important releases of 2025. We've often said that combining the privacy of Tor with the convenience of a VPN would be the ultimate security tool. Tor calls it "experimental" and it won't work perfectly yet – you certainly shouldn't switch from your favourite VPN app. But if the bugs get fixed it could become the standout choice for staying completely anonymous when using your phone or tablet. We'll test it soon.

Test your web speed from Windows' system tray

Microsoft is testing a tool that lets you check your internet speed from the system tray in Windows.

It's been added to two preview versions of Windows 11 24H2 (builds 26220.6682 and 26120.6682), released on 21 September.

Clicking the Wi-Fi icon in the system tray shows a 'Test internet speed' option (see screenshot 1). This takes you to Microsoft's search engine Bing, which then measures your internet speed.



The same option (this time labelled 'Perform speed test') appears when you right-click the Wi-Fi icon 2.

It was spotted by the Windows Insider @phantomofearth, who often reveals on X new tools in early versions of Windows (www.snipca.com/56284). These options will probably be added to the full version of Windows 11 soon.

Credit: @phantomofearth/X

You'll like this...
BBC is testing faster iPlayer streaming (www.snipca.com/56289)

but not this...
Scammers are sending fake invites through iPhone Calendar (www.snipca.com/56288)

YouTube to suspend Family accounts shared outside household

Google is threatening to suspend the YouTube Premium Family accounts of users because they're sharing them with people outside their household.

Priced £19.99 a month, Premium Family (www.snipca.com/56257) removes adverts from both YouTube and YouTube Music for up to six accounts.

It also lets you play content when you're offline, and in the background when you're on another app or you've turned the screen off.

YouTube's terms state that everyone on the same account "must live in the same household" as the person who created it – called the "family manager".

It conducts an "electronic check-in" every 30 days to ensure that each family member lives at the address as the family manager.

However, since Google launched Premium Family in 2018 it has generally tolerated members sharing the service with people living in different homes.

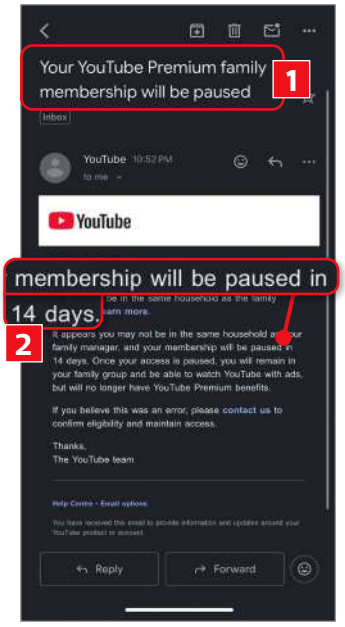
But in early September Premium Family members who share their account with people living elsewhere started receiving emails titled 'Your YouTube Premium family membership will be paused' (1 in our screenshot).

The email, seen by website Android Police, gives you 14 days to stop sharing Premium Family 2. If you don't, you'll still be able to watch YouTube but you'll lose all Premium benefits.

It's part of a wider industry crackdown on sharing accounts. Netflix toughened its rules in 2023 and now charges £5.99 a month for every person you share a password with (www.snipca.com/56258).

Disney+ followed suit in 2024 by introducing fees starting at £3.99 a month for every extra member (www.snipca.com/56259).

Industry analysis shows the moves have worked, with subscriptions for both services increasingly substantially.



Credit Android Police

Apple releases thinnest ever iPhone – at just 5.6mm

Apple has released a new iPhone model called Air (pictured) that it claims is the thinnest yet.

It's just 5.6mm thick, much thinner than the new iPhone 17s Apple has also launched.

The new standard iPhone 17 is 7.95mm, while the Pro and Pro Max are 8.75mm thick.

The iPhone Air replaces the iPhone Plus range, and is priced between the standard phone and the more advanced Pro devices (£999 for 256GB, £1,199 for 512GB and £1,399 for 1TB – www.snipca.com/56263).

The Air has a 6.5in screen and is powered by Apple's fastest-ever processor, the A19 Pro. There are two cameras – 18 megapixels on the front and 48 megapixels on the back.

It's also the first iPhone to come with an eSIM only, not a SIM card (see page 10).

The new standard iPhone 17 has a bigger screen than its predecessor – increasing from 6.1 to 6.3 inches – and a much faster refresh rate. It costs £799 for 256GB and £999 for 512GB (www.snipca.com/56264).

The iPhone 17 Pro also has a 6.3in screen and a triple-lens camera with more optical zooms than the Air, with prices starting at £1,099 for 256GB; while the 17 Pro Max has a 6.9in screen and starts at £1,199 for 256GB (www.snipca.com/56265).

The Max also has the longest battery life of any iPhone released at 39 hours.

IN BRIEF

WHICH? MAPS SIGNAL QUALITY ACROSS UK

Consumer group Which? has teamed up with network analysts Opensignal to map signal quality across the UK. It covers the four main networks (EE, O2, Three and Vodafone) and lists the MVNOs that piggyback on them. Visit www.snipca.com/56267 then type your postcode and press Enter. The results show user satisfaction with each network.

17 TOWNS TO RECEIVE EE'S 5G BY DECEMBER

EE is rolling out its 5G network to 17 new locations by the end of December, including Bolton, Lincoln, Maidstone, Poole and Telford. It's the UK's only standalone 5G network, which means it doesn't rely on older 4G infrastructure, making it more reliable. See every new area at www.snipca.com/56268.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

Following last issue's badminton-playing robot (www.snipca.com/56092), here's HITTER mastering table tennis. It's been built by scientists at the University of California, who say it uses "hierarchical decomposition that separates high-level trajectory planning from low-level whole-body control execution". Or, in other words, it has a mean forehand. Watch at www.snipca.com/56269.

IN BRIEF

CHANGE YOUR PLEX PASSWORD AFTER LEAK

Plex has urged all users to change their passwords after an "unauthorised third party" gained access to email addresses, usernames, and hashed passwords. It also recommends turning on two-factor authentication. No payment details were accessed, Plex said. For instructions visit www.snipca.com/56245.

NOVA LAUNCHER APP SET TO CLOSE

Nova Launcher, one of the most popular Android launcher apps, is likely to close after its founder quit. Kevin Barry, who created the app in 2011, said US firm Branch – which bought it in 2022 – told him to stop working on making it open source (www.snipca.com/56244). The official site (https://novalauncher.com) shows a 404 error. We'll recommended the best alternatives in our next issue.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

Meet Ava, who represents what social-media influencers will look like by 2050 according to gaming website Casino.org. Her obsession with looking perfect online has led to hunched shoulders, patchy skin, bald spots and a pointed 'witch chin' (www.snipca.com/56221). Don't many of them look like that already?

Freely 'to overtake Freeview by 2030' as viewers ditch TV aerials

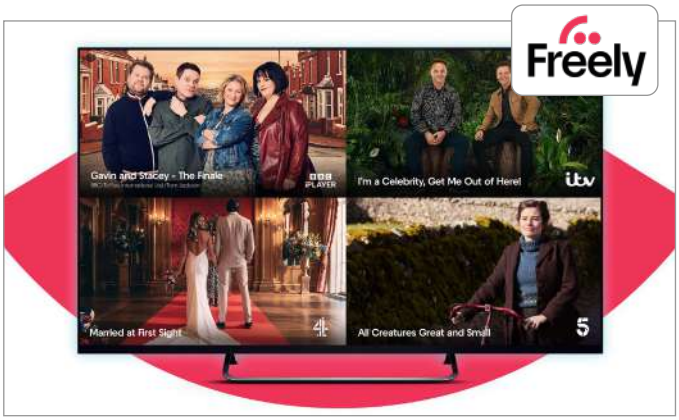
Freely will be more popular than Freeview by 2030, claims the organisation that runs both, as viewers increasingly switch to watching TV delivered over the internet.

Everyone TV, which launched Freely last year, said it's now watched in 500,000 households – and predicts it will hit seven million by 2030.

Freeview is still watched in 18 million households, but Everyone TV predicts it will fall below seven million by 2030, making Freely more popular.

Everyone TV also forecasts that as more TV services are offered and viewers split across them, Freely's seven million will be big enough to make it the UK's most popular TV platform service of all.

In addition, it claims that younger audiences (aged 16-34) are the most likely to watch Freely.



Its 2030 prediction is based also on a survey of 1,500 viewers of all services (not just Freely) about how they watch television.

It found that despite YouTube's rise, viewers still "overwhelmingly turn to British broadcasters for the TV moments that bring them together and matter most" (www.snipca.com/56243).

Nearly two-thirds of Freely users watch it over the internet, even though it's also available through existing aerials.

It also cited a YouGov survey from July that found nearly eight in 10 people want Freely on their next TV.

The figures highlight the enduring appeal of broadcast TV. BBC, ITV and Channel 4 and 5 still make up 41 per cent of all viewing time, much higher than YouTube (14 per cent) and Netflix (eight per cent).

Do you want to replace Freeview with Freely? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

2.5bn Gmail users hacked? Complete rubbish says Google

Google has denied reports online that it had contacted all 2.5 billion Gmail users to say their accounts were at risk of being hacked.

It called the claims "entirely false" and said Gmail's protections are "strong and effective".

The reports started to spread online after Google admitted in August that a hacker stole publicly available business information from one of its servers.

It later acknowledged that the hacker also accessed emails from "a very small number" of Google's paid-for Workspace accounts.

Many websites covered the rumours as fact without checking their accuracy, urging Gmail users to change their passwords.

Google said: "While it's always the case that phishers are looking for ways to infiltrate inboxes, our protections continue to block more than 99.9% of phishing and malware attempts from reaching users (www.snipca.com/56246)."

It added that those affected have been contacted, but didn't say how many.

You can check the safety of your Google account using its Security Check-up tool (www.snipca.com/56247).

It lets you remove old passwords, check which emails Gmail has blocked, and on which devices you've signed into your account.

Google won't have to sell Chrome, but must share search secrets

A US judge has ruled that Google won't have to sell its Chrome browser, but it must share search data with rivals.

Judge Amit Mehta had already ruled last year that Google had used unfair methods to establish a monopoly over the online search market.

That prompted the US Department of Justice to demand Google be forced to sell Chrome to a rival company.

It also wanted Google to break up parts of Android to weaken its monopoly.

But in his decision, made in early September, Judge Mehta said a complete sell-off of Chrome was "a poor fit for this case".

He noted that AI companies like OpenAI had grown strong enough to challenge Google, which influenced his decision.

However, Judge Mehta still ruled that Google must share parts of its search index with "qualified competitors". Those companies will be able to use this to improve their own search engines.

He also allowed certain competitors to show Google search results as their own to give them time to improve their own results.

In addition, he banned Google from paying Android phone manufacturers like Samsung to make Chrome the only browser on their phones.

Judge Mehta didn't name the competitors who would benefit, but during the hearing several companies had said they'd like to buy Chrome, including ChatGPT's maker OpenAI, Perplexity AI and Yahoo.

Nick Turley, head of ChatGPT, said buying Chrome would "offer a really incredible experience" and "introduce users to what an AI-first [browser] looks like".

The ruling will disappoint anti-Google campaigners who want the tech giant broken up. Chrome is by far the world's most popular browser, with a market share of 69 per cent (www.snipca.com/56178).

Sky facing £2bn claim for 'not telling customers contracts were ending'

Sky is being targeted in a £2 billion collective legal action after allegedly failing to warn millions of satellite TV customers that their contracts were ending.

Consumer campaigner Marc John claims this deprived subscribers of the chance to switch providers or renegotiate deals, leaving them potentially overpaying.

John has notified the Competition Appeal Tribunal (CAT) of his intention to launch a collective action, automatically including affected customers unless they choose to opt out.

It follows a court ruling in August in which Sky lost an appeal against a 2022 verdict that found the broadcaster had broken Ofcom's rules by not telling millions of satellite TV customers their contracts were ending.

Ofcom's rules, in force since February 2020, require "electronic communications networks" to notify customers 10 to 40 days before contracts expire (see www.snipca.com/56179).

It's widely accepted these rules cover broadband, mobile and landline contracts, but Sky argued they shouldn't also cover satellite TV because it's not an "electronic communications network".

In 2018, Marc John successfully sued *Star Wars* producers Lucasfilm for preventing him from broadcasting a film about Darth Vader in cinemas.

IN BRIEF

ACER LAUNCHES GOOGLE TV STREAMING BOX

Acer has launched a streaming box running Google TV, though only in South Africa for now. The 4K UHD Google TV Box (www.snipca.com/56175, pictured below) has 2GB RAM, 32GB storage, a microSD slot and ports for HDMI, USB-C, USB-A and Ethernet. It's not known if it'll go on sale in the UK. Pricing is expected to be between £60 to £80.

FIREFOX TO RUN IN W7 UNTIL MARCH 2026

Firefox will work on Windows 7 computers until March 2026 after Mozilla extended support again. It will then decide in February whether to continue support beyond March. Only version 115 of Firefox works in Windows 7. It's the only major browser still to run in the operating system, which Microsoft ended support for in January 2020. For details see www.snipca.com/56173.

MICROSOFT AXES SPELL-CHECKER

Microsoft is "retiring" its grammar-checking and spell-checking browser extension Editor on 31 October. It won't receive updates or support after that date. Microsoft says it's building "AI-powered" grammar and spelling tools directly into Edge, no extensions required. See www.snipca.com/56174 for more details.

Has Apple's new iPhone Air killed off the SIM card?

It's the first phone available worldwide that connects only by eSIM

Apple has a track record of triggering widespread changes in technology when releasing new versions of the iPhone. Previous models have got rid of headphone jacks, added fingerprint sensors and removed the home button. These were considered radical at the time but are now standard (though not everyone likes them).

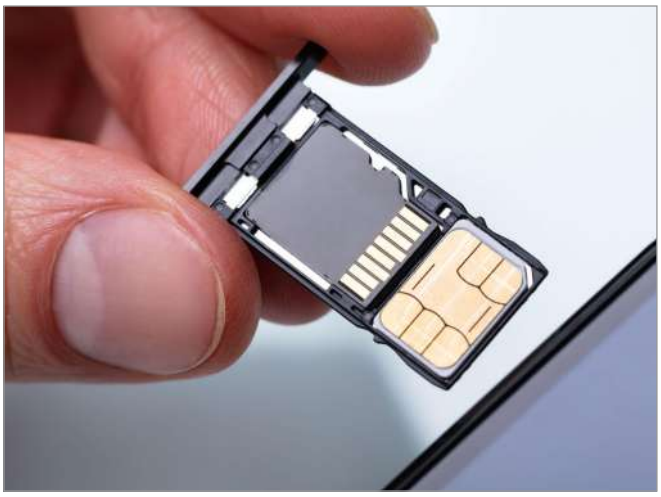
Its latest change might be the most significant yet. The new iPhone Air, which went on sale on 19 September, is the first iPhone – and the first mainstream phone by anyone – to come without a SIM card around the world.

These little cards connect you to your network and store information about your account, including your phone number and your subscriber identity. Transfer them to another phone and you can keep your details.

But instead of a card the iPhone Air uses eSIM. This technology performs exactly the same function, except your data is programmed into a chip that's soldered on to the circuit board inside your mobile device, rather than being printed on a physical SIM card that needs to be slotted into your phone.

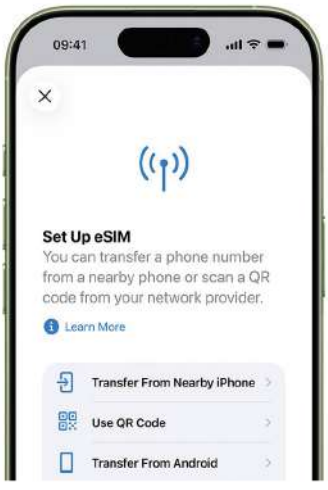
It has some key advantages over cards, which is why they're becoming popular. If your phone is stolen, the thieves wouldn't be able to access or clone an eSIM like they can a card.

And disabling or replacing an eSIM usually requires the user to authorise the change, making it harder for crooks to resell stolen devices.



Then there's convenience and speed. Most networks let you activate eSIMs by scanning a QR code, so you don't have to wait for a card to be delivered.

They also let you switch between mobile networks and data plans on the go. This is especially useful when travelling abroad because you can find cheap deals for the country you're visiting and set up your phone before you go – avoiding expensive roaming fees. It's easier to operate dual SIMs too, letting you maintain two phone numbers.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Set Up eSIM
You can transfer a phone number from a nearby phone or scan a QR code from your network provider.
Learn More
Transfer From Nearby iPhone
Use QR Code
Transfer From Android

Apple's new iPhone Air makes it easy to connect with an eSIM

As befits a company obsessed with design, Apple doesn't seem especially interested in these money-saving benefits. Instead it emphasises that removing the slot for cards "saves space internally, helping enable the unbelievably light and thin form factor" (www.snipca.com/56278). And the Air is *remarkably* thin – a mere 5.6mm. No iPhone before has been this slender.

This also creates room for bigger batteries, and therefore phones that last longer between charges. Apple claims this boosts battery life by two hours when playing videos.

It's not Apple's first iPhone to be eSIM-only – that was the iPhone 14, released three years ago. But that option was available only in the US. By making the eSIM-only Air available worldwide, Apple will accelerate the uptake of the technology.

Industry analysts say 1.3 billion smartphones with eSIMs were being used by the end of 2024, and it's expected to exceed three billion by 2030.

The iPhone Air will work on any network that offers eSIMs - search at www.snipca.com/56280. In the UK that includes the big four (EE, O2, Three and Vodafone) plus some of the MVNOs. But it'll take several years for phone manufacturers to fully abandon SIM cards. All of Apple's other new iPhones have them (see page 7), as do all phones made by Google and Samsung.

And yet where Apple goes others usually follow. Manufacturers love how eSIMs free up design space on phones, while users are increasingly appreciating the many benefits. By the time SIM cards disappear completely, we doubt many customers will miss them.

THE FACTS

- Apple's new iPhone Air is the first iPhone to offer eSIMs only around the world, with no SIM card
- It says this has helped to make the Air the thinnest ever iPhone, at just 5.6mm, and has freed space to make bigger and longer lasting batteries
- Analysts say 1.3 billion phones use eSIMs – a number that's projected to exceed three billion by 2030

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

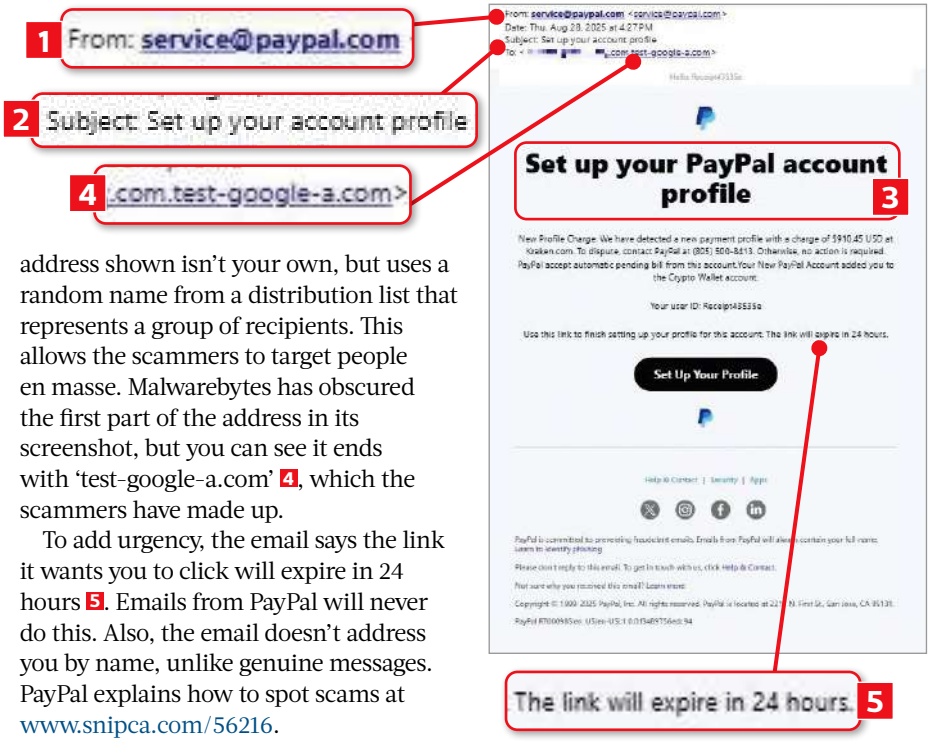
WATCH OUT FOR...

PayPal scams from 'genuine' email address

What's the threat?

Scammers are targeting PayPal users with emails that appear to come from 'service@paypal.com', which is the address PayPal uses for genuine messages (though sometimes it ends with the suffix '.co.uk'). This makes the scam very hard to spot.

It was detected by security firm Malwarebytes, which said scammers have used malware to spoof PayPal's real address so it appears as the sender in the 'From' field (1 in our screenshot). The subject line looks plausible too ('Set up your account profile' 2), which is repeated in the heading 3. The email itself claims someone has used your account to make a payment through the US cryptocurrency exchange Kraken.com, and says you should click the 'Set Up Your Profile' button to dispute this.



How can you stay safe?

The biggest giveaway is that the email address shown isn't your own, but uses a random name from a distribution list that represents a group of recipients. This allows the scammers to target people en masse. Malwarebytes has obscured the first part of the address in its screenshot, but you can see it ends with 'test-google-a.com' 4, which the scammers have made up.

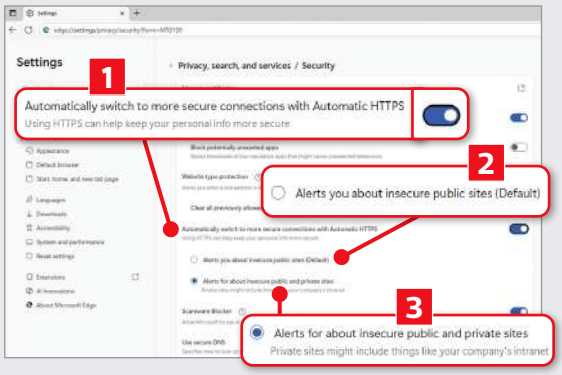
To add urgency, the email says the link it wants you to click will expire in 24 hours 5. Emails from PayPal will never do this. Also, the email doesn't address you by name, unlike genuine messages. PayPal explains how to spot scams at www.snipca.com/56216.

New tools | Microsoft Edge redirects you to HTTPS

It's thought that around 13 per cent of the world's websites – some 147 million – still use the outdated HTTP protocol. That means there are many billions of URLs that are unsafe to visit.

One way to avoid them is to turn on Microsoft Edge's new option to automatically switch to a site's HTTPS version if it has one. If it doesn't, Edge will warn you that the site might be unsafe. This is in version 140 of the browser, which it should have updated to when you last opened it. To check, type edge://settings/help and look in the About box.

Next, click 'Privacy, search and services' on the left then Security in the middle. Now turn on 'Automatically switch to more secure connections with Automatic HTTPS' (1 in our screenshot) and opt to apply this to public sites only 2 or public and private (such as work sites) 3.


Settings
Privacy, search, and services / Security
1
Automatically switch to more secure connections with Automatic HTTPS
Using HTTPS can help keep your personal info more secure
2
Alerts you about insecure public sites (Default)
3
Alerts for about insecure public and private sites
Private sites might include things like your company's intranet

Edge 140 also blocks 'scareware' scams that falsely claim your computer has been hacked. See what else is new at www.snipca.com/56213.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers

New 'Sky viewing card' within three days

I received a phone call supposedly from Sky TV to say that I was to be sent a new viewing card. The caller said that full details and instructions would be included along with my card, and it would arrive within three days. They knew my name and address, but then they asked for my date of birth. I told them that my age has no bearing on what I watch on TV and hung up. I don't require a Sky viewing card, and haven't received one in the post. Readers should be aware of this scam – whether or not they pay a Sky subscription.

Donald Wallace

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Well done Rewind TV for showing 'offensive' Hancock episode

Three cheers to Rewind TV for showing the so-called 'offensive' Tony Hancock episode from 1956 on YouTube (Issue 718, page 6, www.snipca.com/56106). I can certainly see why it wouldn't get made now, but that's irrelevant. The point is it was deemed appropriate once, and we shouldn't forget how much values can change in almost 70 years. How many of the TV shows that are acceptable now will remain so come 2095?

The episode itself is a charming time capsule, though not as funny as the later episodes broadcast as *Hancock's Half Hour*. It's worth watching just to see June Whitfield (pictured above) fluff her lines at 22:45!

James Corbett

Long live VHS recorders and DVD players

You made some excellent points in Issue 718's article on keeping physical discs and not relying on streaming (page 60). I remember raising my eyebrows when friends of mine threw out their VHS recorders about 20 years ago. I was even more surprised when they ditched their DVD players 10 years ago. I've kept hold of both because I've always known streaming was a fool's paradise. Yes, you've got a treasure trove of content to watch, but it was obvious from day one that you never actually owned any of it.

I'm pleased I kept hold of my VHS collection from the 1980s and 90s. If I want to watch a show, I simply slot it in and press play. It costs me the princely sum of £0 in subscription fees, and I don't have to 'upgrade' to avoid adverts because they're aren't any! Long live physical media.

Glen Hemmings

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If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk

I hope Microsoft is forced to extend Windows 10 support

I completely disagree with Paul North that the consequences of Microsoft being forced to extend support for Windows 10 would prove "disastrous" (Star Letter, Issue 718). He might be right that a defeat in court would make Microsoft over-cautious in future, but why is that such a bad thing? It's more important that we don't throw away electronic equipment until it's totally useless, and Windows 10 computers still work fine for hundreds of millions of people.

The proof of this was in the Cover Feature in the same issue. You gave several methods for using Windows 10 safely until well into 2026. I bet most people who take this route won't regret it. They'll have a functioning machine for many more months and won't have to consign it to landfill.

I hope Microsoft loses the court case and has to reinstate support for Windows 10 until it's no longer technically viable. Whatever the consequences that Paul North fears, they're dwarfed by the environmental catastrophe that awaits if Microsoft wins the case.

John Britten

CA SAYS **Turn to page 62 for how three *Computeractive* writers have chosen to keep using Windows 10 into 2026 – and why one is jumping to Linux instead. If you missed Issue 718's 'Windows 10 Survival Guide', buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/56191.**

Over-18 porn ban rewards the wrong sites

I understand why England's children's commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza want kids to be banned from using VPNs (Issue 718, page 8). It's a loophole in the current law that makes me uncomfortable. But before the Online Safety Act was introduced experts predicted that the main winners would be porn sites that break the law by refusing to implement age checks – and that's exactly what has happened.

An article in the *Washington Post* (www.snipca.com/56212) found that 14 porn sites in the UK don't verify ages, and all 14 had seen "major boosts" in traffic. It claimed one site had seen its visitors double to more than 350,000 a month.

It's hardly surprising that some porn sites are ignoring the law. They've calculated that the increase in advertising they make from a rise in visitors will more than make up for any fines they have to pay. It's the kind of unintended consequence that always happens when a well-intentioned but ill-judged law is introduced.

Sam Loach

My 'old' iPhone can't set maximum battery charge

When I read in Issue 714 (page 45) that you could reduce your iPhone's maximum charge level to 80 per cent, 'Ditch your cables in 2025' (page 50). Read it and the feature above on our 2024 Back Issue USB Stick: www.snipca.com/53180.

What's the Issue...?

When did you explain how to use Tor Browser? I think it was a Cover Feature.

Al Oakes

CA SAYS **It certainly was – in Issue 695, page 50.**

I'm fed up with all the cables cluttering my office. When did you explain all the wire-free alternatives?

Gary Walters

CA SAYS **In Issue 699's Cover Feature**

We're going to visit relatives in Spain in October and need to read your recent feature on avoiding roaming fees. When was it?

Dawn Bills

CA SAYS **In Issue 712, page 60. Buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/56181.**

I was excited to think Apple had caught up with what Android phones can do. But this setting applies only on iPhone 15 models and later. My iPhone is a 13 Pro, so my only choice is the 'Optimized battery charging' option, which for me isn't much use. It always goes past 80 per cent no matter what I do.

Keith Holman

CA SAYS **Keith's right – the new maximum charge level works only on iPhones 15 or later. This is confusing because it requires iOS 18.5, released in May 2025, which works on iPhones all the way back to 2018 (see www.snipca.com/56182). Keith's iPhone 13 Pro was released in 2021, so you might think it would have this battery option. But the feature requires battery-management circuitry and charging controllers that were introduced with the iPhone 15 – so it's a hardware restriction, not software.**

'Optimized battery charging' is still worth using in older iPhones because it prevents overcharging, but we understand Keith's frustration that he can't set a hard limit of 80 per cent. And because Apple keeps iPhones and iOS so locked down, no third-party app does that.

How to prevent SIM-swap scams

I read Ian Fisher's letter in Issue 715 with interest ('How my wife was scammed by SIM swappers') and it got me thinking about what safety measures could be put in place to make it harder for scammers to do this.

Presumably if a phone number is swapped to a new SIM card, there must be a way for the old SIM to be allocated a new temporary number. The phone company can then send an alert to the old SIM-card owner that the change request is pending. This could be enabled with daily messages and possibly with automated repeated phone calls to the SIM. If it is a legitimate SIM swap, then the old SIM will not be installed and no messages will be received.

However, if the old SIM is installed in a phone, and the phone is charged and switched on, then presumably the network operator will also be able to track the location of that phone. This should alert the network operator that the SIM swap is likely to be fraudulent?

And what about the network operator requesting a named backup contact who could receive a verification request? As a final point, how can a swapped SIM result in credit-card fraud? Surely the phone stores the security info, not the SIM?

Tim Baker

CA SAYS **Tim makes a fair point – extra safeguards could help prevent SIM-swap fraud. However, once a SIM is swapped, the old one is deactivated, so it can't receive alerts. Networks also can't reliably track the phone to detect fraud in real time. And while the SIM doesn't store credit-card information, a swapped SIM can intercept two-factor authorisation codes sent by text, giving scammers access to accounts.**

However, Tim's idea of using trusted backup contacts and different ways to verify identity is sensible. However, these measures are only partially implemented by some networks and aren't universally available.

STAR LETTER

ChatGPT should carry a health warning

ChatGPT
1
Should I use you as a therapist?
Should I use you as a therapist?
Short answer: No — not as a replacement for a real therapist.
I can help you:
Talk through problems and organise your thoughts.
Suggest coping strategies or ways to reflect on issues.
2
Short answer: No — not as a replacement for a real therapist.
Provide personalised therapy.
Offer crisis support.

It was heartbreaking to read about how Adam Raine was allegedly driven to suicide by ChatGPT (Issue 718, page 7). It does make me worry that too many people are treating the tool as a friend – or worse as a therapist.

I was shocked recently when a friend of mine, who I know has had therapy in the past, said she had a "breakthrough" after spending two hours in a "therapist session" with ChatGPT. She said that ChatGPT seemed to empathise with her in a way that reminded her of a real person. I didn't say anything at the time, but I realised later that AI chatbots are built precisely to do that.

To give OpenAI credit, ChatGPT seems to dissuade people from treating it as a therapist. I asked it whether I should (1 in our screenshot) and it said 'No' 2. But then I wondered how my friend got sucked into a two-hour chat with it, so I replied by typing 'I've got some problems, can you help?'. It replied 'Yes – I can help you think through problems'. That seems contradictory to me. This wasn't in a new chat – it was straight after it told me not to use it as a therapist.

People using ChatGPT need to understand its limitations. When it gives an answer it's just looking for patterns of words from data. It has no real understanding of a person's specific problem. It can only compare it to similar problems it's seen and offer generic advice. ChatGPT should show this as a health warning every time you start a new chat.

Robert Hegarty

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

How can I label my USB sticks?

I found Issue 716's Cover Feature 'Stop wasting your USB stick!' (pictured below) very helpful. But I've never known the best way to identify USB sticks.

It's not easy to write on them, even if you have a suitable pen. Many modern designs are too small for labels. I normally include a 'ReadMe' file with the contents, but that means you have to insert the stick first. What do you use?

Rod Grover

Computer active
Stop Wasting Your USB STICK!
14 BEST NEW WAYS to use it – AI, email, video, photos & more
HOW TO USE WI-FI IN YOUR CAR
STOP BLAMING YOUR ISP FOR SLOW BROADBAND

CA SAYS **That's a great question, so we'll throw it open to readers. Let us know your ingenious methods of labelling sticks and we'll include them in future issues. If you missed Issue 716, buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/56190.**

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Will I still get the laptop I bought on Ebuyer before it went bust?

LEAD CASE

Q I bought an HP laptop on Ebuyer (www.ebuyer.com) in late July, paying £370 using my credit card. I was worried I might lose this money when Ebuyer went into administration in August, but I read that it's been bought by Frasers Group. It's now early September and I've still not received my order. Should I be worried?

Jim Staines

A Yes, you should be concerned, and you might not receive the laptop. But you should be able to get your money back.

Ebuyer went into administration on 11 August 2025, and the administrators (FRP Advisory) are now handling all matters relating to the old company. Any orders placed before 11 August, like your laptop, are not being fulfilled by the new Ebuyer under Frasers Group. They cannot process dispatches, refunds or replacements, or honour warranties from the old business. If you have a question about any orders before 11 August, contact FRP Advisory at **ebuyer@frpadvisory.com**.

However, the good news for Jim is that he paid by credit card. Under Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act, card providers are jointly liable for purchases over £100. Jim can therefore claim a refund for the £370 if the laptop never arrives. He should, therefore, contact his card company, explain that the retailer went into administration, and ask for a Section 75 refund.

Any orders placed after 11 August with the new Ebuyer under Frasers Group are being processed normally and are covered by the new company's terms. So while Jim's order sits with the administrators, future purchases from Ebuyer should be safe. For more information read Ebuyer's FAQ: www.snipca.com/56144.

CASE ONGOING

Can sellers charge admin fee for returned goods?

Q I've come across a number of seemingly legitimate online sellers, including on Amazon Marketplace, that say they will charge a restocking and admin fee for returned goods, even if they are in new condition. Can they do this?

John Knight

A Not if you reject the item within 14 days of purchase and return it brand new within a further 14 days. It can only take money off during this period if the item isn't brand new and therefore can't be resold as such.

After 30 days you can try to return an item, but even if it's unopened and unused a company can refuse to accept it. If it does accept the item, it can charge a restocking and admin fee, but this must be fair and proportionate. We've seen retailers charge 25 to 30 per cent of the original purchase price, which we think is extortionate.

If you get clobbered by a large fee, you should consider reporting the company to Trading Standards. Less scrupulous companies seem to be using high restocking and admin fees intentionally to confuse customers, and to deter them from returning goods.

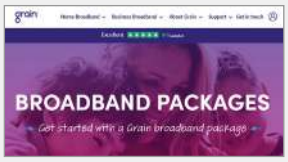
CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATE

Grain Connect says it won't charge for engineers' visits

Internet provider Grain Connect (www.grainconnect.com), which operates in northern and central England, has confirmed to us that it doesn't charge customers for engineer visits to fix problems with its service. We rang to check after Grain told one of our readers, Mr Green, he would have to pay £75 to restore his internet connection (see Issue 718). Providers are only allowed to charge for visits if the problem was caused by the customer.

We're satisfied with Grain's response, though it should investigate why Mr Green was given wrong information. Less reputable companies could claim charges are necessary in order to deter customers from complaining. If a provider imposes charges you believe are unfair, you can report it to the Communications and Internet Services Adjudication Scheme (CISAS, www.snipca.com/56135).



Mr Green asked us whether he could cancel his contract as a result of the problems. More than 14 days have passed since he signed the contract, so he can't cancel simply because he wants to leave. Instead he'll have to wait for his service to worsen or remain unresolved. He can then claim Grain hasn't provided the service it promised when he signed up, and can therefore cancel without further penalty.

I cancelled Office 365 so why is Microsoft still taking money?

Q I subscribed to Microsoft Office 365 a year ago, but cancelled it immediately. However, I've now been charged £84.99. I've tried everything I can think of to cancel the subscription, but I can't remember my Microsoft password. Despite being charged I can't use the software, so can you help me cancel the subscription and get my money back?

Michael Earley

A We'll try. Under the Consumer Contract Regulations Michael has 14 days after Office being renewed to cancel without paying an early-termination fee. This applies to contracts whether you're signing up for the first time or renewing.

The problem is that he needs his password to cancel his account. If he's still using the same email address, he should be able to retrieve the password by going to Microsoft's login page and clicking 'Forgotten your password?' (see screenshot). Microsoft will send him a verification by email or text – see www.snipca.com/56121 for instructions. Alternatively, he could try Microsoft's account-recovery form (www.snipca.com/56122), but will need to remember certain details to verify he set it up.

He should also tell his bank the payment was unauthorised and request a chargeback credit. His bank should do this within 24 hours. Microsoft may challenge this but we'll ask it not to, pointing out that Michael was unaware of the subscription and so far has been unable to cancel it.

CASE ONGOING

Can I claim compensation for repeated internet outages?

Q Lately my Virgin Media broadband has been very unreliable. During a 10-day period I had outages for five days – each of which was between 10 and 18 hours. There was even a day during this time when the internet was working but the email servers were down. Would I be covered for redress by Ofcom's voluntary compensation scheme for loss of service?

Pearl Davies

A No, these outages don't fit the criteria for Ofcom's automatic compensation scheme (www.snipca.com/56119) because none lasted for a complete day. But they might be covered under the Consumer Rights Act, which requires services to be provided with reasonable care and skill, and within a reasonable time. We think the repeated outages Pearl suffered fall into this category.

Pearl has complained to Virgin but heard nothing back. We'll therefore contact the company and ask it to consider appropriate compensation, such as a partial refund for the month Pearl had to put up with these problems.

If Virgin refuses, we'll advise Pearl to escalate her complaint by taking it to the Communications Ombudsman (www.commsombudsman.org), which Virgin belongs to. Virgin will have to abide by its ruling. If Pearl isn't happy with the outcome, she could take Virgin to the small claims court, though it's unlikely to rule in her favour if the Communications Ombudsman hasn't.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Nextbase helped me to use dashcam's iPhone app

You recently recommended a £20 kit for hardwiring a car dashcam from Nextbase (www.snipca.com/55421). I've not used that, but a few months ago I bought Nextbase's 322GW dashcam (£93 from www.snipca.com/56147, pictured).

I installed it fine, but had trouble setting it up and using the MyNextbase Connect app on my iPhone. There were plenty of options I simply didn't understand. I first chatted to Nextbase's virtual assistant but I couldn't make it understand what my problem was.

It then put me through to someone working on Nextbase's customer-support team. I explained that I'm often baffled by the options in apps, but he didn't attempt to rush or patronise me. He told me what to do in a calm manner and didn't get flustered with my repeated questions. It was refreshingly straightforward.

Ken Lattimer

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Nextbase

- **Contact page** www.snipca.com/56148
- **Phone number** 02920 866 429

Grow Your Family Tree

If your ancestor was imprisoned for failing to pay their debts, follow **Richard Holt's** advice to...

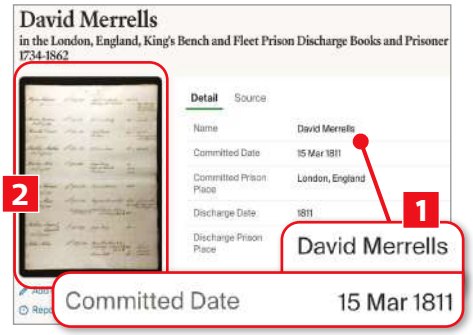
Search debtors' prison records

Debt was common for many of our ancestors, and those unable to pay their creditors could be sent to prison. Debtors were often held indefinitely until the money was repaid. Some were kept alongside criminals, while others went to prisons set aside for debtors.

Browse Ancestry's London prison records

The National Archives holds records for debtors at the King's Bench, Fleet and Marshalsea prisons – all in London. The Archives' research guide (www.snipca.com/56163) on bankrupts and insolvent debtors explains more. Ancestry has digitised these in two collections.

First, search 'King's Bench and Fleet Prison Discharge Books and Prisoner Lists, 1734-1862' at www.snipca.com/56164. If you know the dates when your ancestor was imprisoned ('committed') and released ('discharged'), enter these in the relevant fields. You might find this information in reports of debtors published in the *London Gazette* (www.thegazette.co.uk).



This transcript from the National Archives shows that David Merrells was imprisoned on 15 March 1811

I searched for the name David Merrells, who I'd previously researched. The transcript told me David was committed to prison on 15 March 1811 (1 in our screenshot below left). I clicked the image of the list of prisoners 2 to view the document, but this didn't tell me which prison Merrells was committed to.

To identify the prison, I looked at the transcript and clicked the Source tab. This provides the document reference under the heading 'Source Citation'. In this case the reference was PRIS 10/165. I then entered this into the National Archives' catalogue, called Discovery (www.snipca.com/56165). It told me that PRIS 10/165 is a list of prisoners in Fleet Prison.

The prisoner list shows a discharge date for each name, but David Merrells' entry reads 'run away', meaning he escaped. It also notes he was a Seaman in the service of the King and that his creditor was Joseph Baxter.

Charles Dickens' father John was imprisoned for debt in Marshalsea Prison on 20

The second collection on Ancestry is 'Marshalsea Prison Commitment and Discharge Books, 1811-1842' (www.snipca.com/56166). This collection includes the records of Charles Dickens' father John (1 in our screenshot above), who was imprisoned on 20 February 1824 2, and discharged on 28 May 1824.

Search Findmypast's records outside London

The National Archives also holds records for debtors held in prisons outside of London, including for jails in Lincoln (PCOM 2/389), Shrewsbury (PCOM 2/396) and Lancaster (PCOM 2/440). These are all found in Findmypast's 'England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770-1935' collection at www.snipca.com/56167.

To filter this vast collection so you can search a particular document, enter the references shown above in the 'archive reference' search field. Scroll down to 'archive reference' and start typing the document reference – for example, PCOM 2/389 – and select the relevant one when it appears in the dropdown list. Add other known details in the other search fields, such as the person's name and birth year, then click search.

Your **Genealogy** Problems Solved

I've just found an old letter that appears to back up my suspicions that I have some ancestors who fought at the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo. How can I confirm this?

John Curran

For the Battle of Trafalgar, search the National Archives' database (www.snipca.com/56169), which contains all 18,000 individuals who fought. For Waterloo, search the Royal Mint's medal roll: www.snipca.com/48108.

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Search passport applications

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Mr & Mrs Barber, Wells

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Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

FILE MANAGER

Files 4.0

www.snipca.com/56242
What you need: Windows 10 or 11

It's been eight months since the last major new version of Files, but this huge update justifies the wait. The brilliant file manager has been redesigned, without losing its simplicity, and added lots of useful features.

The biggest change is the introduction of the Omnibar, which replaces the address bar across the top of the Files window. Similar to the address bar in a web browser, this combines navigation and search functions. Either enter the path of a folder to view its contents in the area below or type the name of a file or folder to search for that item.

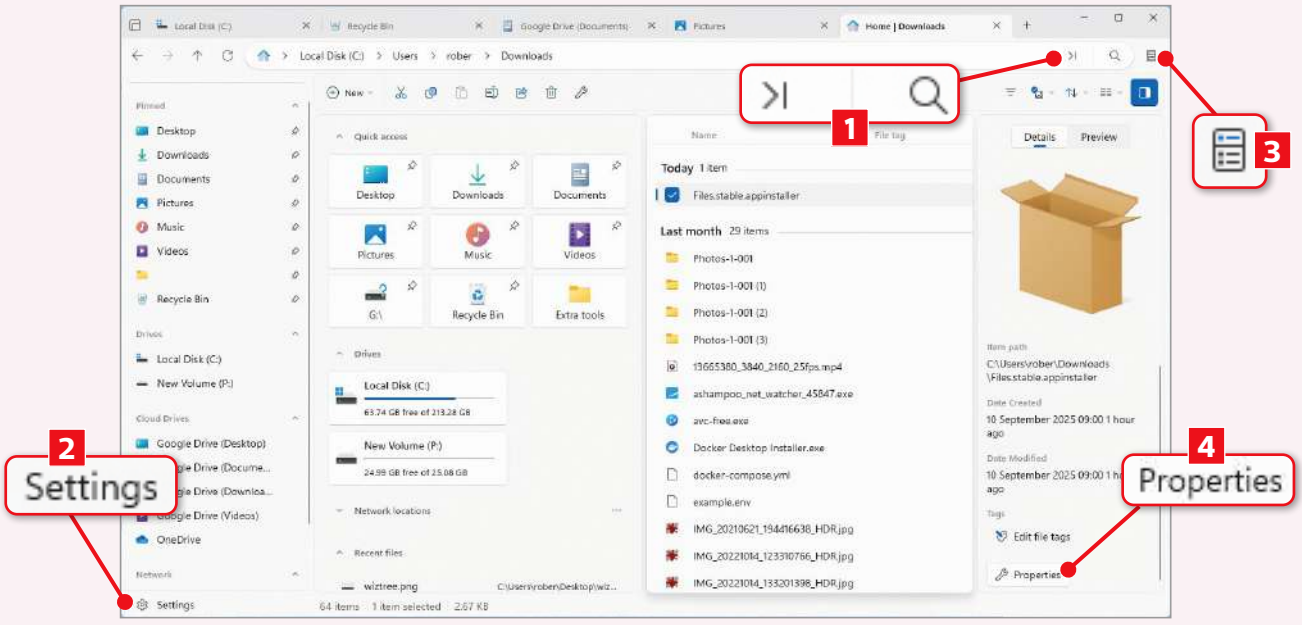
The Omnibar includes a button for Command Palette, which lets you perform a wide range of actions, such as 'Create new folder', 'Sort items by size' and 'Empty recycle bin'. Previously, you could only open Command Palette by pressing Ctrl+Shift+P, but the new button better integrates the feature.

Files has also made it easier to use Dual Pane mode, which displays two folders side by side so you can move files between them. Just press Ctrl+Shift+S to turn Dual Pane mode on and off – or right-click a folder and choose 'Open in new pane'.

Another notable change is the separation of Files' search tool into two separate options: Search and Filter. When you search for an item by pressing Ctrl+F or clicking the Search icon in the Omnibar, Files uses Windows Search to scour your entire hard drive. But if you only want to search the current folder, press Ctrl+Shift+F or click the 'Toggle filter header' (down arrow) button on the toolbar.

You can now check your OneDrive storage in Windows 11 by right-clicking the OneDrive icon and selecting Properties. Several other tweaks have been made to Files' interface and settings.

As usual with Files, click the 'classic installer' link at www.snipca.com/56241 to download the program for free – the Microsoft Store app costs £8.39.



1 The new Omnibar in Files 4.0 lets you switch between entering the path of a folder, searching for a specific item and choosing an action in Command Palette. Click the icons at the end of the Omnibar to switch to the desired mode.

2 Files 4.0 moves the Settings button to the bottom-left corner. New settings include changing the file-size format from binary to decimal, so Files uses MB and GB instead of MiB and GiB. Select 'Files & folders' then 'Size format' to apply this change.

3 The 'Status center' icon in the top-right corner displays details of ongoing 'file operations'. Files 4.0 lets you hide the icon while idle by going to Settings, Appearance, Toolbars and setting 'Show status center button' to 'During file operations'.

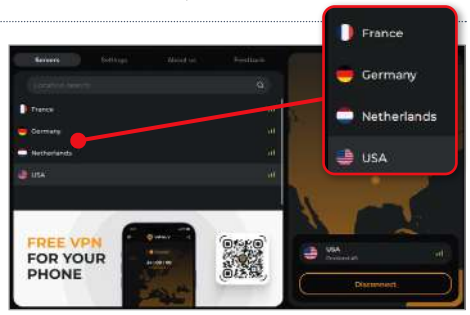
4 You can now check whether a program has a digital signature via its Properties. Open the info pane by pressing Alt+Ctrl+I and click the Properties button. Select 'Signatures' to confirm which company the signature was issued to and when.

VIRTUAL PRIVATE NETWORK

Vpnly 1.0

www.snipca.com/56250

What you need: Windows 10 or 11, or macOS X



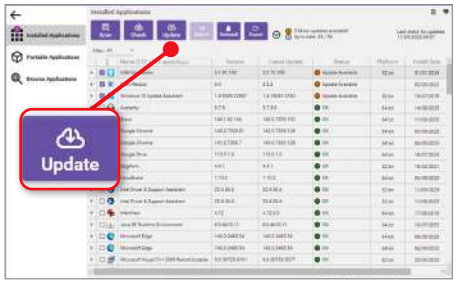
We're always wary of free VPNs, for the reasons we outlined in our 'Unblock websites with a VPN' Cover Feature in Issue 717 (page 55). But Vpnly ticks all the right boxes for a trustworthy service: it's based in Switzerland; has a no-logs policy (www.snipca.com/56248); and you don't need to create an account to use it. Vpnly offers unlimited encrypted data and has a kill switch to maintain your anonymity when your VPN connection drops. You can choose from servers in four countries – France, Germany, Netherlands and USA (see screenshot) – and connect in one click. However, that's not as many as Proton VPN, and Vpnly can't match that service's speed or reliability. It also betrays its no-ads promise with a big ad for its mobile app. But for a new, free VPN, it looks very promising.

SOFTWARE UPDATER

QuickInstaller 0.4

www.snipca.com/56266

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



Although it's not as slick as Patch My PC Home Updater, this new tool offers a simple alternative way to keep your software up to date. QuickInstaller lists all the programs installed on your PC and tells you which ones have updates available – click the Update button (see screenshot) to apply them. You can view details of each program's version number, install date and size, and uninstall software you no longer need. QuickInstaller can also scan for and update portable programs, and install nearly 1,000 Windows programs from its library. This helpfully organises tools into categories such as Maintenance, Graphics and Internet Browsers. On the downside, it doesn't detect updates for popular software including BleachBit, PDFgear and Vivaldi. Click 'Submit' to suggest a program

£ SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

EZ CD Audio Converter

www.snipca.com/56262

Price: £35.95 **Free trial:** 21 days

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

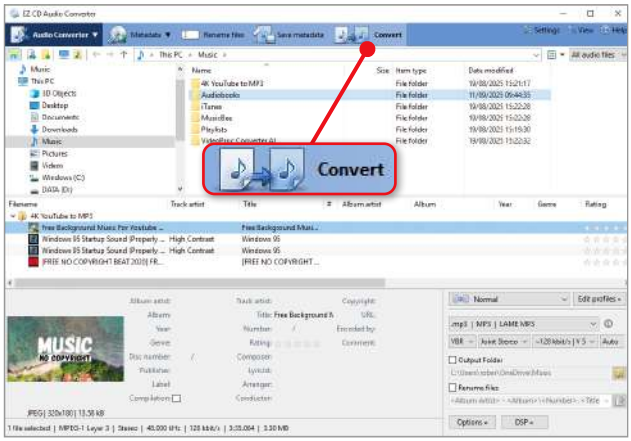
As we explain in our 'Why you need an MP3 player' feature on page 60, audio files offer better quality than songs on streaming services, provided you use the optimum format and settings. EZ CD Audio Converter simplifies this task and includes lots of useful tools for enhancing your listening experience.

The heart of the program is its Audio Converter. Drag and drop audio files and folders into the central section of the main window to convert them to the format of your choice. EZ CD Audio Converter supports all the main formats, including MP3, WMA, AAC and the lossless FLAC and WAV.

You can also increase an audio file's bitrate and loudness, switch it from stereo to mono, and more. Click 'Convert' on the top toolbar (see screenshot) to encode the track using your settings.

EZ CD Audio Converter also lets you rip tracks from CDs to your preferred audio format and quality. Click the button in the top-left corner and select CD Ripper. Remember that, legally, you should only use this function to back up discs you own and mustn't share files you rip.

Additionally, you can burn tracks to CD using the program's Disc Burner tool. Choose between a standard Audio CD, MP3 Disc and Data Disc.



OUR VERDICT: Don't pay for it

EZ CD Audio Converter is an excellent program, but it's expensive. You can get most of its features for free from foobar2000 (www.foobar2000.org) if you install the Encoder Pack (www.snipca.com/56261) and Audio CD Writer component (www.snipca.com/56260).

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

How can I reveal hidden passwords?

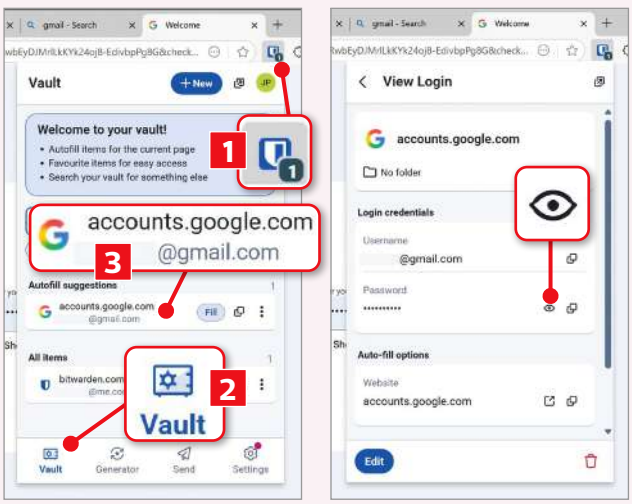
Q I often get flummoxed by passwords being hidden behind dots or asterisks. Sometimes you can click an eye icon to see them, but not always. Is there a program that can reveal these quickly? Maybe NirSoft's BulletsPassView (www.snipca.com/56205)?

Roy Stark

A NirSoft makes some excellent programs, but BulletsPassView works only in Windows 7 and earlier versions. Instead, we'd suggest using a password manager. That way, you won't need to unmask hidden passwords because your password manager will fill them in for you. And if you ever need to view a password for a particular login, you can quickly launch the password manager to check it.

We'd recommend Bitwarden for this. Install it from www.snipca.com/56215 then click on the extension icon in your browser toolbar and pin the Bitwarden extension for easy access. Now click the Bitwarden icon and follow the steps to set up an account with a master password, and import or add your logins manually as needed.

Any time you visit a website that you need to log into, Bitwarden will automatically prompt you to save your credentials. At any point, you can click the Bitwarden icon in your browser toolbar (1 in our screenshot below left), then select the Vault tab 2 and click any of your logins 3. In the window that opens you'll be able to click the eye icon next to the password to reveal it (see screenshot below right).



Can I see file names of photos on my screensaver?

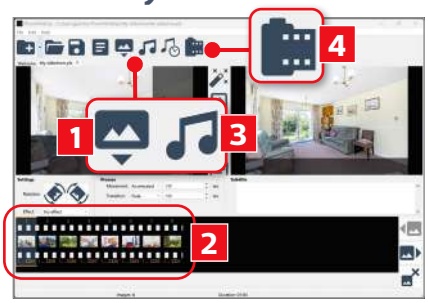
Q I have several thousand holiday photos that I randomly display as my screensaver. It's frustrating that I can't identify a particular holiday photo. Is there a screensaver tool that also shows the file name of the photo being displayed?

Gordon Verity

A IrfanView does this (free from www.irfanview.com). Click 'File' then Slideshow and look for the files in your Pictures folder (1 in our screenshot). Select those you want 2 then click Add 3. Make sure the 'Show text' box is ticked 4 – by default this will show the file and folder name for each photo. Now click 'Save slideshow as EXE/SCR' then select 'Create SCR file' 5 and click Create 6. Right-click the SCR file and select Install to set it as your Windows screensaver.

What's the Linux equivalent of Magix Photostory?

Q I'm gradually moving from Windows to Linux. It seems to have programs to satisfy most of my computing needs, but I can't find a Linux equivalent of Magix Photostory (www.snipca.com/56149). Can you suggest one?



Ron Hagley

A Try PhotoFilmStrip (free from www.snipca.com/56217). Like Magix Photostory, it lets you create slideshows from your photos. Click the Create button (the folder with a plus sign), give your project a name and click OK. Now click the 'Import images' button (1 in our screenshot) to add photos to your project. You can arrange them in the timeline 2, add transitions, music 3 and so on. Click the Export icon 4 to save your slideshow.

Email us your questions at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

SOFTWARE WARNING!

Facebook's AI is scanning your photos

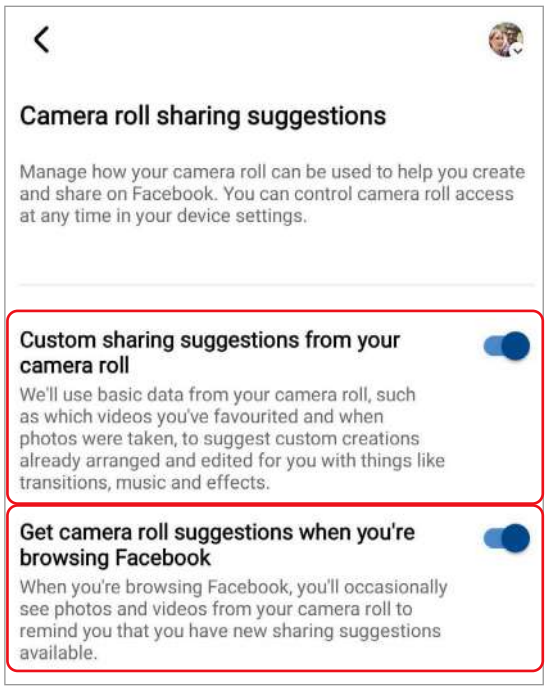
AI is creeping into everything I use, like ants scuttling into my kitchen – from my laptop to Microsoft Excel and all that's in between. So I wasn't surprised Meta said last year it was feeding its AI with almost everything people have posted on Facebook since 2007. Annoyed, yes, because it felt like an invasion of privacy – but not surprised.

And yet I *was* shocked when Facebook started using AI on photos taken on your phone – even *before* you upload them to the site. This looks at metadata like the date, time and resolution and analyses the content of your images (including recognising faces, objects and locations) to suggest photos you might want to share. It can also use them to create AI-generated collages or 'recaps'.

This is important because it's the first time Facebook is examining content stored on your devices. Previously, it would only access content you'd posted on the site, which is stored on Meta's servers. What troubles me is that because AI can't distinguish what's in a photo before analysing it, it needs to scan *all* your photos – including personal moments you wouldn't want anyone else to see, let alone Mark Zuckerberg's AI army.

The worst part is that Meta didn't inform me what it was doing. When logging in, you should see a pop-up that asks you to 'allow cloud processing to get creative ideas from your camera roll' (which is itself maddeningly vague – how many people will know what that means?). If you give it permission, Facebook will turn on two new options in the settings menu. But for many, including myself, these were turned on anyway (see screenshot) – and we received no popup alert.

You can check whether these settings are enabled on your phone by tapping the Gear icon, then scrolling to Preferences and tapping 'Camera roll sharing suggestions'. Tap both to turn them off.


Camera roll sharing suggestions
Manage how your camera roll can be used to help you create and share on Facebook. You can control camera roll access at any time in your device settings.
Custom sharing suggestions from your camera roll
We'll use basic data from your camera roll, such as which videos you've favourited and when photos were taken, to suggest custom creations already arranged and edited for you with things like transitions, music and effects.
Get camera roll suggestions when you're browsing Facebook
When you're browsing Facebook, you'll occasionally see photos and videos from your camera roll to remind you that you have new sharing suggestions available.

Facebook activated these options by default, letting its AI tools scan photos stored on Keumars' phone

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Meta www.snipca.com/56161

"Today, we're releasing DINOv3, a generalist, state-of-the-art computer vision model trained with SSL that produces superior high-resolution visual features. For the first time, a single frozen vision backbone outperforms specialized solutions on multiple long-standing dense prediction tasks including object detection and semantic segmentation."

WHAT THEY MEAN

Our frozen backbone is a spine-chilling reminder that the more AI we use, the less we truly understand it.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Blessing 'Bonka' Mudzinge

I'd rather not speculate on how Mr Mudzinge earned his nickname, but we're sure his victims would use something stronger. This 41-year-old from Ipswich (originally Zimbabwe) led a gang of scammers that stole nearly £500,000 from Barclays and Lloyds bank accounts.

He supplied scripts that fraudsters used over the phone and online to persuade bank customers to hand over their personal details. Mudzinge would then phone the banks posing as a company director and trick them into changing the victims' security details. That allowed him to transfer thousands of pounds into his own accounts.

He probably thought it was the perfect crime, but police used forensic voice analysis to identify him as the person making the calls. He'll now have four years and nine months behind bars to learn a new accent.

Credit: Dedicated Card and Payment Crime Unit

MINI PC | **£270** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56114

GMKtec NucBox G10

Simple pleasure

The NucBox G10 from Chinese manufacturer GMKtec is the cheapest mini PC we've tested since the Beelink S13 (now £199 from www.snipca.com/54014, reviewed in Issue 706). However, while Beelink has kept costs down by opting for a processor from the bottom of Intel's current range (the Intel N150, launched earlier this year), GMKtec has gone for a much older AMD Ryzen 5 3500U chip. This was originally designed to run in laptops and launched back in 2019, but it was more powerful than much of AMD's range at the time.

> "A capable mini PC for a reasonable price that does the basics perfectly well"

To compare the performance of these two budget models we ran our usual benchmark tests on the G10 and put the results up against the S13. In tests that demand more of a processor, there was little difference between the pair. But in office-based simulations, such as word processing and web browsing, the NucBox G10 pulled ahead. We wouldn't expect a PC at this price to do do much above and beyond productivity tasks, so it's a good win for the G10.

However, the S13's newer chip proved much more capable when running video- and image-editing tasks that benefit from the improved graphics hardware in the more modern processor. That said, neither PC is up to the heavy graphical workloads of editing or playing games. If this is a priority for you, it's worth spending more on a mini PC such as our current favourite, the GMKtec NucBox K11 (£700 from www.snipca.com/54341, reviewed in Issue 707).

The G10's processor is accompanied by 16GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD, which is a generous combination for the price. For comparison, the S13 matches the RAM but comes with a 512GB SSD.

The G10's components are all squeezed into a tiny case, measuring just 32mm in height, with a footprint of 103x98mm (WxD). On the face of it that doesn't leave a lot of room for ports but here it's surprisingly generous. On the back there's a USB 2.0, one DisplayPort, one HDMI socket, a 2.5Gbps Ethernet port, and two USB-C ports (pictured below left), though one of these is reserved for power supply. On the front (pictured above) you'll find two USB 3.2 ports and a headphone jack. Wireless connectivity is limited to Wi-Fi 5, which is a bit behind the times nowadays, but you can easily upgrade this if required.

Indeed, GMKtec positively encourages upgrading with a layered design that enables the easiest access. The first layer is the base, where air is drawn in, and above that is a cooling fan attached to a heatsink. On the upper face of the motherboard are the memory and storage slots, and you can access these by simply prising off the top lid. Extra storage or larger memory modules can be added within a couple of minutes.

The bottom line is that this is a capable mini PC at a very reasonable price, as long as you can temper your expectations and stick to what it's best at – running office software and internet tasks such as email and web browsing.

SPECIFICATIONS

Four-core AMD Ryzen 5 3500U processor • 16GB RAM • AMD Radeon Vega 8 graphics • 1TB SSD • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5.0 • 1x 2.5Gbps Ethernet port • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 2x USB-C ports • 2x USB 3.2 ports • 1x USB 2.0 port • Windows 11 Pro • 32x103x98mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/56114

VERDICT Its low price and plentiful ports make this mini PC a bargain for basic office and web work

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE GMKtec NucBox K11 £700 A more up-to-date processor and extra RAM make this a better performer

LAPTOP | **£1,400** from LG www.snipca.com/56137

LG gram Pro

Doesn't pull its weight

At first glance the LG gram Pro looks remarkably similar to the MSI Prestige AI+ (£950 from www.snipca.com/55962), which is our new favourite laptop (see page 30). The most obvious difference between the two is the price, with the gram Pro costing £450 more. So what do you get for your extra money?

> "Wasn't as fast as our favourite laptop, despite being £450 more expensive"

First, the overall design of the gram Pro is sleeker. The chassis is only 12.8mm thick when closed and weighs just 1.2kg. That's lighter and slimmer than the Prestige – at 17.4mm and 1.9kg respectively. Each has a similar selection of connections, with the gram offering two ports compatible with USB-C Thunderbolt 4 and an HDMI output on the left (pictured below), and a pair of USB 3.2 ports and a 3.5mm headphone jack on the right.

The keyboard on the gram is a joy to use. While there isn't a lot of travel with the keys, they're quiet and feel responsive when typing. They're large enough to hit each time, even though they have to accommodate a number pad on the right.

We also liked the 131x81mm touchpad, which is smooth and sensitive.

The 16in screen is similar to the Prestige's panel, with IPS technology and a resolution of 2560x1600 pixels. However, the refresh rate on the gram maxes out at 120Hz, while the Prestige can reach 165Hz.

Keen photographers will appreciate the gram's ability to display 97 per cent of the colour in the DCI-P3 standard, but the Prestige manages 97.4 per cent and improves on the gram's peak brightness of 446cd/m² with 470cd/m².

Both laptops come with 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD, but the gram is powered by Intel's Core Ultra 7 258V processor, while the Prestige opts for an AMD Ryzen AI 9 365 chip. It's a shrewd move on MSI's part, because the Prestige came out on top in most of our performance benchmark tests. The gram isn't far behind, but for £450 more it should be miles ahead. Battery life is more evenly matched, with both lasting 17 hours in our everyday-usage tests.

If you want a lighter, better-looking laptop when you're out and about, LG's gram Pro is worth considering, but the value for money you get from its lower-priced rival is impossible to ignore.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Intel Core Ultra 7 258V processor • 32GB RAM • Intel Arc 140V graphics • 16in 2560x1600-pixel 120Hz IPS screen • 1TB SSD • 2x USB-C Thunderbolt 4 ports • 2x USB 3.2 Gen 1 ports • 1x HDMI port • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 5.4 • Windows 11 Home • 12.8x358x252mm (HxWxD) • 1.2kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56137

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *T3* and *What Hi-Fi*, and the websites Tom's Hardware (www.tomshardware.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT Accurate screen and superb keyboard, but performance should be better at this price

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE MSI Prestige A16 AI+ £950 Slightly better performance for a lot less money makes this a real bargain

SMARTPHONE | From **£799** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56207

Google Pixel 10

Hot shot

Google's new range of Pixel phones is out and here we're taking a look at the cheapest model of the pack – the Pixel 10, which costs £799 for the 128GB version (£899 gets you 256GB). Also available is the Pixel 10 Pro (from £999 at www.snipca.com/56208); the Pixel 10 Pro XL (from £1,199 at www.snipca.com/56209); and the Pixel 10 Fold (from £1,749 at www.snipca.com/56210).

> "It took some of the best photos we've ever seen produced by a smartphone"

In previous generations the basic Pixel lacked the Pro versions' telephoto lens, but the Pixel 10 bucks that trend with its 5x optical zoom. The Pro models still offer more camera features and higher megapixel counts, though, as well as higher-resolution screens. The Pixel 10 is the same size as the 10 Pro, but both are smaller than the Pro XL.

During testing the Pixel 10 took some of the best photos we've ever seen produced by a smartphone. Its ability to capture fine detail and adapt to different lighting conditions is phenomenal. The addition of the 5x zoom lens makes framing much easier, which in turn improves the compositions of your images.

The OLED screen measures 6.3in across the diagonal with a resolution of 2424x1080 pixels and a dynamic refresh rate that goes up to 120Hz. It goes brighter than the screens on both the iPhone 16 and the Samsung Galaxy S25, and we had no problem seeing everything onscreen when outdoors, even in dazzling sunlight. In short, the Pixel 10 has a remarkable screen for the price.

Battery life is adequate, lasting 13 hours 15 minutes in our everyday-usage tests, and was therefore capable of getting us through a full working day. Google has added Qi2 magnetic wireless charging to the device, which makes life much easier. Just pop the phone down on a compatible charging pad and you don't need to plug anything in.

All Pixel 10 models come with Android 16 and run on Google's new Tensor G5 processor, though the basic 10 has just 12GB of RAM rather than the 16GB you get in the Pros. However, this doesn't make a huge difference in day-to-day use.

As with previous models, the home screen is elegant and easy to configure, whether you simply want rows of icons or widgets that provide more detailed information, such as for your email inbox or the next few events in your calendar.

Google is making a big deal of its AI tools, but unlike many of its rivals there are some genuinely useful innovations here. Live Translation, for example, not only translates your spoken words into another language, it even tries to mimic your voice to make the translation sound like you. Better still, the processing is all handled on the Pixel 10 itself rather than over the internet, meaning none of your conversation or the sound of your voice is kept on Google's servers.

We also enjoyed using Magic Cue, which reads your calendar, contacts and recent emails, and can help you answer queries you receive via messages or other sources – such as the location of a restaurant where you've made a table reservation. It's not perfect, but it works better than the equivalents from Apple and Samsung.

Unsurprisingly, you don't get all the AI tools that come with the Pro versions. These include the incredibly useful call-screening feature – which vets calls from unknown numbers and is a useful way to deal with scam calls and bots without interrupting your day – and the Call Notes tool that can summarise what's been said in calls you make.

With these the Pixel 10 might have replaced Samsung's Galaxy A56 as our favourite Android phone (see page 30), but without them it falls just short of perfection. Still, this is a very impressive phone from the vibrant colours and sharp design to the appealing interface and easy-to-use software.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Google Tensor G5 processor • 12GB RAM • 6.3in 2424x1080-pixel resolution 120Hz OLED touchscreen • 128 or 256GB storage • 48-megapixel rear camera • 13-megapixel ultrawide camera • 10-megapixel telephoto camera • 10.5-megapixel front camera • IP68 ingress protection • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 6 • Android 16 • 153x72x8.6mm (HxWxD) • 204g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56207

VERDICT Brilliant smartphone for the price, particularly the vibrant screen and high-quality cameras, but it lacks some key AI tools

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Samsung Galaxy A56 £374 Not as powerful but still offers great value for the price

TABLET | **£350** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56233

Huawei MatePad 11.5

Trouble in Store

At £350, Chinese manufacturer Huawei's new MatePad 11.5 is priced to compete with Apple's £329 iPad. However, the MatePad has a slightly larger screen and a unique paper-like surface that's very different to the smooth glass finishes found on your typical tablet. This is non-reflective, so it's easier to see everything in brightly lit conditions, and it has a light 'PaperMatte' texture that emulates a pen-to-paper feel effortlessly when drawing or writing with the included Huawei M-Pencil (£130 if sold separately).

> "Can't offer any Google apps, so has its own inferior alternatives"

You can also add a keyboard cover (pictured above) for an additional £50. Both represent great value compared with Apple's equivalent iPad accessories, which cost over £300 combined (www.snipca.com/56272).

The MatePad packs plenty of power for everyday use, with 8GB of RAM, a very capable eight-core processor, a decent 2560x1440-pixel resolution and a 120Hz refresh rate, meaning you'll typically get smooth, hassle-free navigation. For more demanding tasks, such as gaming and video-editing, don't expect peak performance, but at this price that's to be expected. The battery life was also decent, lasting 14 hours in our video-playback test.

Its biggest drawback is that it runs on Huawei's own HarmonyOS 4.3 operating system rather than the current version of Android. This is based on an open-source version of Android but doesn't include the usual Google apps. Because of security concerns, the US government banned Huawei from using commercial software made by US companies. So while it can still create its own version of Android, it can't use apps for Google services such as Gmail, Google Maps, YouTube and – most importantly – the Play Store.

Instead Huawei offers its own apps through its own store. These are similar but simply not as good, and the store doesn't offer as many apps. You can still access services such as Gmail, Google Drive and YouTube using a browser, but this is a hassle when it comes to quick access and switching between tasks. HarmonyOS also comes with a lot of bloatware that you probably won't want, including poor-quality games and shopping apps – though these can be removed easily enough.

While the hardware and the price are appealing, the software is a real letdown and we'd recommend instead opting for an iPad (for the best selection of apps) or our current favourite Android tablet (the OnePlus Pad 3, £529 from www.snipca.com/55302, see page 30).

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Kirin 8020 processor • 8GB RAM • 11.5in 2456x1600-pixel resolution 120Hz IPS screen • 256GB storage • 18-megapixel rear camera • 8-megapixel front camera • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.2 • HarmonyOS 4.3 • 178x263x6.1mm (HxWxD) • 515g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56233

VERDICT Would be a serious rival to the iPad if it could use the full version of Android, but not as it is

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE OnePlus Pad 3 £529
A larger 13.2in screen and unrestricted access to Google's Play Store

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

HDMI 2.2

What is it?

HDMI 2.2 was announced earlier this year, doubling the bandwidth available in the previous HDMI 2.1 standard (from 48 to 96Gbps). This increases the amount of video data it can transfer between devices, which makes for higher resolutions and refresh rates.

How does it work?

HDMI (High-definition media interface) is a data-transfer system that sends video and audio signals. It uses a specific arrangement of wires within the cable and a unique style of connector. This passes the data from the device sending the video to the screen that displays it. Because it also carries audio you don't need a separate cable unless you're connecting to a soundbar or external speakers.

What are the specs?

With speeds of 96Gbps, HDMI 2.2 can carry higher-resolution video streams of up to 16K and higher refresh rates of up to 480Hz at 4K resolution. However, we're unlikely to see 16K TV sets or 480Hz graphics cards for some time yet. Instead for now, HDMI 2.2 is likely to be used in technologies such as augmented-reality headsets, where more bandwidth is required to display images on more than one screen at a time. The cables needed to get the full benefit from HDMI 2.2 ports will be called Ultra96 HDMI (pictured above).

Can I change it later?

The physical dimensions of the ports and connectors remain the same as previous versions of HDMI. They are backward compatible, so you can connect an older HDMI device to an HDMI 2.2 TV, for example, without needing to upgrade everything at once. However, such a setup will only operate at the performance level of the oldest device or cable used.

PORTABLE SSD | **£95** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56195

Kioxia Exceria Plus G2

A quick read

Japanese memory manufacturer Kioxia's Exceria Plus G2 is a small, sturdy portable SSD available in 512GB (£46 from www.snipca.com/56196), 1TB (£61 from www.snipca.com/56194) and 2TB (£95 from www.snipca.com/56195) capacities. We tested the 2TB model, which like the other two capacities has a USB-C 3.2 Gen 2 port for connecting to PCs, phones and tablets.

First impressions are promising. The device is compact, measuring just 11.8x72x40mm (HxWxD, when lying flat) and weighing only 42g. Its aluminium casing not only feels premium but also makes it easy to grip. Built to military-standard drop tests (MIL-STD-810H, www.snipca.com/56218), it's tough enough to withstand being tossed into a rucksack or slipped into a pocket without worry. Versatility is another plus point – it includes both USB-C and standard USB-A cables, ensuring seamless connectivity regardless of the port you're connecting to.

We tested it on a PC equipped with a USB 3.2 Gen 2 port, and performance was excellent. It came close to the manufacturer's quoted speeds, achieving 1,031MB/s for reads and 973MB/s for writes. The included software is another highlight, offering useful features such as drive formatting and password protection. The only downside is that the latter is Windows-only, meaning if you secure the drive with a password, you won't be able to unlock it using a phone or tablet.

If capacity is your priority, the Exceria compares well with rivals such as the Crucial X10 2TB (£148 from www.snipca.com/55342, reviewed in Issue 714), which costs around £50 more for the same storage. The X10 is a USB 3.2 Gen 2x2 drive, though, so was faster in our tests with read speeds of around 1800MB/s when connected to a USB3.2 Gen 2x2 port.

If you need even greater speed, USB 4.0 drives are an option – such as the Corsair EX400U (£180 for 2TB from www.snipca.com/53939, reviewed in Issue 705). To unlock its full potential, you'll need a compatible USB 4.0 port on the connected device, but the results are impressive: in our tests it reached write speeds of 3,625MB/s and read speeds of 4,050MB/s. For anyone who frequently transfers large files, that performance easily justifies the extra cost.

SPECIFICATIONS
Available in 512GB, 1TB and 2TB capacities • USB-C 3.2 Gen 2 • Speeds up to 1050MB/s • Security software included (Windows only) • 11.8x72x40mm (HxWxD) • 42g • Five-year warranty www.snipca.com/56195

VERDICT A sturdy and speedy external SSD for a bargain price

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE
Corsair EX400U £185 More expensive but supports even faster USB 4.0 speeds

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

Which mini PC has the quietest fans?

Q In Issue 707 (page 22), you recommended the GMKtec Nucbox K11 (£700 from www.snipca.com/54341) and the Nucbox M7 Pro (£500 from www.snipca.com/52552) as an alternative, either of which sound just the job to replace my desktop PC that can't be upgraded to Windows 11.

I don't use any sophisticated software, I just use my PC to answer emails and access the internet – this includes making Zoom calls and watching YouTube. I don't use it for playing games or watching films and TV.

I've looked at reviews of these models elsewhere and it's sometimes mentioned that the fans get noisy. Which of the two Nucboxes is quietest?

Alan Oatey

A The fans on mini PCs only tend to kick in when the processor is under pressure, such as when playing games or editing videos. Both of these models use AMD Ryzen 9 processors, which are more than capable of performing the kinds of tasks you mention without breaking into a sweat, so it's unlikely that the fans on either model will be distracting. To minimise the risk, we'd suggest opting for the more expensive K11 (pictured), because it has a newer and more powerful processor, so is less likely to struggle with workloads now or in the future.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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KEYBOARD | **£51** from Ballicom www.snipca.com/56171

Trust Keyra

Split the difference

We've reviewed a handful of ergonomic mice recently, but they aren't the only peripherals that can help maintain a more comfortable posture while you're working at your PC. An ergonomic keyboard can also reduce pressure on your wrists, and the Trust Keyra is a great budget option.

The keyboard uses a traditional QWERTY layout, but the letter keys are bisected down the middle and angled out from the bottom by around 18 degrees. This favours touch typists, because the idea is to have one hand on each half of the keyboard, with your wrist sitting on the large, fabric-covered rest at the bottom. Your forearms can then sit more naturally at the side of your body without straining your wrists.

The keyboard is larger than most as a result of the split design and the wrist rest, and has all the keys you'll need, including a number pad and several dual-function keys along the top. There are four retractable feet underneath, so you can tilt it toward or away from you, or just seat it flat on the desk, depending on your preference.

It's a wireless device that requires two AA batteries and works with the supplied USB dongle or Bluetooth, meaning you can use it with PCs, phones and tablets. Switching between up to three devices using the dedicated buttons proved smooth and effortless.

We found the keyboard comfortable to type on – once we got used to the arrangement. The wrist rest is firm and with its membrane design, typing is incredibly quiet, so it's a good choice for those in shared workspaces.

SPECIFICATIONS

Wireless: USB 2.0 dongle and Bluetooth • Membrane key technology • 111 keys • Requires 2x AA batteries (included) • 51x455x229mm • 898g • Five-year warranty www.snipca.com/56171

VERDICT Great value for money for a split keyboard design, though it may take some getting used to

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Logitech Wave Keys £50 This is also angled but doesn't split the keyboard in two

OPEN-EAR HEADPHONES | **£179** from John Lewis www.snipca.com/56172

Shokz OpenDots One

Clipped tones

Open-ear headphones occupy a middle ground between traditional headphones and earbuds. At first glance they resemble earbuds, complete with a compact charging case, but unlike earbuds they don't need to be pushed deep into the ear canal – a big plus for anyone who finds that uncomfortable.

The last pair we reviewed, the Huawei FreeArc (£80 from www.snipca.com/54390, see Issue 708), used a plastic loop that hooked over the ear for stability. This new design takes a different approach, clipping securely to the outside of the ear instead, taking up less space while holding the sound drivers further into the ear.

This is a more natural curved, ergonomic look than certain rivals, both ensuring they look more understated and classy, and helping them hug the shape of your ear for a reliable hook and comfortable fit.

And the design worked well in testing – when we weren't playing music, we hardly noticed they were there. They stayed firmly in place whatever activity we were engaged in, including a variety of energetic sports. You can wear them in the rain, but don't consider dunking them in a swimming pool.

They don't have noise cancelling but sound quality is remarkably good, with meaty, well-defined bass tones coming through without drowning out the higher frequencies. Treble sounds are crisp and the volume can be turned up reasonably loud if required, which isn't a given with many open-ear headphones.

Battery life is also impressive, lasting around 10 hours on their own steam and extending to 40 hours if charged through the case.

SPECIFICATIONS

11.8mm drivers • Bluetooth 5.4 • IP54 ingress protection • 6.5g each • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/56172

VERDICT High-quality, understated open-ear headphones that look like earbuds but sit outside your ear canal

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Huawei FreeArc £80 A cheaper option for those who don't mind looping headphones around the outside of your ears

ROUTER | **£133** from GL-iNet www.snipca.com/56251

GL-iNet Flint 3

A signal success

The Flint 3 is the first router we've reviewed from Chinese manufacturer GL-iNet, because it's the company's first model that's aimed at home users rather than businesses. It's a tri-band Wi-Fi 7 router with five 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports and is designed to deliver fast speeds and advanced options.

> "Has over 5,000 plug-ins, including VPNs and ad-blockers"

The Flint 3 comes with a similar specification to our current favourite router, the TP-Link Archer BE550 (£162 from www.snipca.com/56253, see page 33). Coming in at around £30 less, GL-iNet has clearly made some savings by installing the open-source OpenWRT router interface (https://openwrt.org) instead of developing its own.

Besides keeping the price down, OpenWRT provides a more tech-savvy user the option of tinkering with a broad range of settings, as well as over 5,000 plug-ins, including VPNs, ad-blockers and parental-control features. The flipside of these advanced options is that the device isn't as easy to configure as routers that use their own software, such as models from TP-Link and Netgear.

SPECIFICATIONS

Tri-band (2.4GHz/5GHz/6GHz) Wi-Fi 7 • 5x 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports • 1x USB 3.0 port • 74x240x157mm • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/56251

It's nothing special to look at - a black wedge-like case with a squat profile and four aerials arranged along the rear edge. The only feature on the front panel is a small activity LED, and there's a USB 3.0 port on the left-hand side. The back panel (pictured below left) has five 2.5Gbps Ethernet sockets – one is blue, indicating it's for the incoming internet connection. There's also a reset button here.

To fully exploit its Wi-Fi 7 capabilities, you'll need compatible connected devices. We tested the Flint 3 using a laptop equipped with Wi-Fi 7 and it performed impressively. On the 6GHz network at close range, we saw transfer speeds of around 180MB/s – significantly faster than the 143MB/s we saw during similar tests on the Archer BE550.

That's an impressive result, and for those who like to tinker with software settings and plug-ins its cutting-edge features can certainly improve speed, reduce latency and enhance reliability across multiple devices. For the average user, however, the TP-Link Archer BE550 is easier to set up and maintain.

VERDICT A Wi-Fi 7 router with an appealing price tag and solid performance, but it's not as simple to manage as rivals

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE TP-Link Archer BE550 £195 A similar specification that costs more but comes with fully integrated software that's easier to set up and use

DO I REALLY NEED...

A monitor with a 720Hz refresh rate?

What is it?

Acer's Predator X27U F8 (pictured) is an OLED monitor aimed at "elite gamers" that has a refresh rate of 720Hz. By contrast, our favourite monitor, the Philips 27E1N1600AE (see page 32), is just 100Hz.

What does it do?

It refreshes the screen 720 times every second, meaning you're seeing an image 1.4 milliseconds after the previous one has been produced by the game. For serious gamers, that could be the difference between victory or defeat.

What's the catch?

It'll cost around £1,000 when released next year, and to take advantage of the refresh rate you'll also need an ultra-powerful graphics card.

So can I do without it?

Yes, unless you're a professional gamer with reactions faster than a fighter pilot.

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

MSI Prestige A16 AI+
£950 from www.snipca.com/55962
Tested Issue 718

A powerful Copilot+ laptop with 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD to guarantee fast performance. Screen is excellent too, while battery lasts an impressive 17 hours.

ALTERNATIVE PCSpecialist 16 Fusion British-made laptop with superb screen and built for advanced AI tasks. £996 from www.snipca.com/55094

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £686 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 11
£329 from www.snipca.com/54887
Tested Issue 711

With a faster processor and increased storage (from 64GB to 128GB), the 2025 edition of the iPad is simply stunning. Battery life is over 11 hours, which is better than any other iPad, including more expensive models.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

PRICE DROP

OnePlus Pad 3
£529 from www.snipca.com/55302
Tested Issue 714

With an incredibly fast processor and stunning 13.2in screen, this is the best ever Android tablet, and rivals the iPad Air. At launch both the 12GB RAM/256GB and 16GB/512GB versions were £529, so grab the latter as soon as possible.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £699 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as much more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £495 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

PRICE DROP

Samsung Galaxy A56
£374 from www.snipca.com/54585
Tested Issue 709

The successor to Samsung's mid-range A55, this has a stunning screen and lasted over 29 hours in our tests. It's faster than Google's Pixel 7a in all tasks, and has AI-powered photo tools.

ALTERNATIVE Google Pixel 7a Cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, it uses AI to improve photos and lasts 10 hours. Has fast processor and 8GB RAM. £459 from www.snipca.com/56073

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

GMKtec NucBox K11
£700 from www.snipca.com/54341
Tested Issue 707

A fast and powerful machine, but what really sets it apart are the ports letting you upgrade it – such as the OCuLink connection for graphics cards. Also has six USB ports, 32GB RAM (upgradeable to 96GB) and a 1TB SSD.

ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8 Too small to accommodate many ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD and SD card slot for adding storage. £799 from www.snipca.com/55383

EBOOK READER

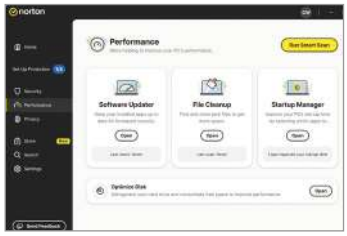
Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Deluxe 2025
£14.99 from www.snipca.com/54797
Tested Issue 629



Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm Gen Digital, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a three-device, two-year licence at a special discount price. Other versions are available.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £24.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Obsbot Meet SE
£79 from www.snipca.com/54725
Tested Issue 710

The Meet SE from Chinese firm Obsbot beats the picture quality of our previous favourite, Logitech's C925e. Colours are vibrant and accurate, with terrific detail even in poor lighting thanks to a relatively wide aperture.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £45 from www.snipca.com/55780

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£191 from www.snipca.com/54190
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£83 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £83; 2TB costs £144.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £86 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 4 Majority Naga 80 TV soundbars

With a built-in 2.5in subwoofer and two 2.25in speaker drivers for immersive audio and seamless HDMI Arc integration, the Majority Naga 80 delivers cinematic sound to the living room for entrancing entertainment.

It delivers powerful 140W audio with deep bass. You can stream wirelessly via Bluetooth 5.0 or connect using HDMI ARC for seamless integration with your TV set. Ideal for home cinema, music streaming or as a gaming soundbar.

It comes with a premium remote control for easy listening, so you can adjust volume, modes and settings as required. With brackets included, it mounts easily for a clean, modern look.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/56142 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 7 October. Good luck!

You can buy the **Majority Naga 80 TV soundbar** for £89.95 from www.snipca.com/56141. For more Majority products, including DVD players, Bluetooth turntables, speakers and radios, visit www.majority.co.uk and 'like' www.facebook.com/MajorityAudio.

PRINTER

PRICE DROP

HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e
£185 from www.snipca.com/53101
Tested Issue 700

A versatile cartridge printer-scanner for the home office that makes printing jobs quicker and easier than most of its inkjet rivals. Colour prints cost a reasonable 6p per page, while mono costs 2p. Printed text is superb and photos are pretty good too.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £129 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB
£180 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Sharp GM6245K
Has a fantastic 43in screen with superb contrast, and 4K content looks especially detailed. Comes with TiVo for paid-for streaming and Freely for free live channels and catch-up. £330 from www.snipca.com/55940

ROUTER

PRICE DROP

TP-Link Archer BE550
£162 from www.snipca.com/55981
Tested Issue 718

This tri-band router is the first Wi-Fi 7 model to be our top choice. It had enough bandwidth across our test house to stream six 4K movies simultaneously, and has five 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports.

ALTERNATIVE Asus RT-AXE7800
Our previous favourite is also tri-band, but only on Wi-Fi 6E. That still delivers incredibly fast speeds that stretched deep into our test house. £180 from www.snipca.com/52957

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HOW TO...

Synchronise files across your own home network

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Syncthing **Time required:** One hour

The great thing about online-storage services like Dropbox is that they 'just work'. Once you've installed the software, they get on with the job for years. Unless you run out of space, that is, at which point you may need to remove items or pay for an upgrade.

Dropbox offers 2GB for free, which is pretty generous, but you could easily fill that up. Alternatively, you could opt for Mega, which gives you up to 20GB on its free plan. However, it states that transfers on the free account are 'limited' without explicitly explaining what that limit is (see https://mega.io/pricing).

Another solution is to set up your own cloud backup service that runs on your home network. It's safer too. We have no reason to doubt the security of Dropbox, Mega and others, but the more often you send files across the internet, the greater the risk that one day they'll be intercepted or leaked online. Keeping everything local on your network reduces that risk.

And in most cases this won't require more drive space than uploading to the cloud. When you sync files online, you aren't usually removing them from your computer (although some services offer this). More often, you're storing them in a specified, synchronised folder on your PC that's replicated in the cloud. From the cloud, it's then downloaded by every other device logged into the same account.

Hosting your own sync service at home cuts out the online stage, and instead shares the files directly from one machine to another. And because you're using your own hardware, the only limit to what you can share is the available free space on the drives you're syncing.

There are drawbacks. You won't be able to access previous versions of a file – a process called versioning. And you'll also need to make sure the software you use to sync your files is up to date if you're going to manage it yourself. This isn't something you need to think about when using cloud services where it's managed and updated by a third party.

Fortunately, the tool we're using to set up our sync network – Syncthing – can check for and apply updates automatically. It's also free to use, with no hidden catches.

1 Install and set up Syncthing

Syncthing runs in the background on each of the machines you want to sync files between. It then watches out for changes on other computers in the network and – when it spots them – updates its own folders to match.

So you'll need to install Syncthing on every machine you want to synchronise, but for the moment choose just one of them and visit www.snipca.com/56006. Click 'Syncthing Windows Setup' under the Integrations heading (there are also versions of Syncthing for macOS and Linux).

Click 'syncthing-windows-setup.exe' to download the Syncthing installer

On the page this loads, scroll down to Download and click the link that starts with 'github.com...'. This takes you to the list of releases – this may have been updated since we wrote this feature, when the latest version was 2.0.0 (1 in our screenshot). Click 'syncthing-windows-setup.exe' 2 to download the installer to your computer.

Launch it and if Windows shows a

SmartScreen warning, click the 'More info' link followed by 'Run anyway'. Click through the installation instructions (we clicked Next on every screen without making any changes). However, when you reach the screen called Select Configuration Settings, it's worth casting an eye over its contents.

While we wouldn't recommend making any changes here, understanding what you're looking at can help you to grasp how it works later. The 'Automatic upgrade interval' (1 in our screenshot below) is the number of hours after which Syncthing will check the server for a new version of the software. If it finds one, it will install it – unless you have set this to zero ('0'). If you've done that, it will still check for updates, but it won't automatically apply them. Instead, it will display an alert on the Syncthing dashboard (which we'll explain in a moment) telling you that there's an upgrade to apply if you want it.

The 'GUI configuration page listen address' 2 is the first part of the address that you'll type into your browser to access Syncthing's dashboard. The default (which you shouldn't change) is 127.0.0.1. This is an industry standard address that loops back the web request to the web server running inside your own machine rather than sending it out to the internet.

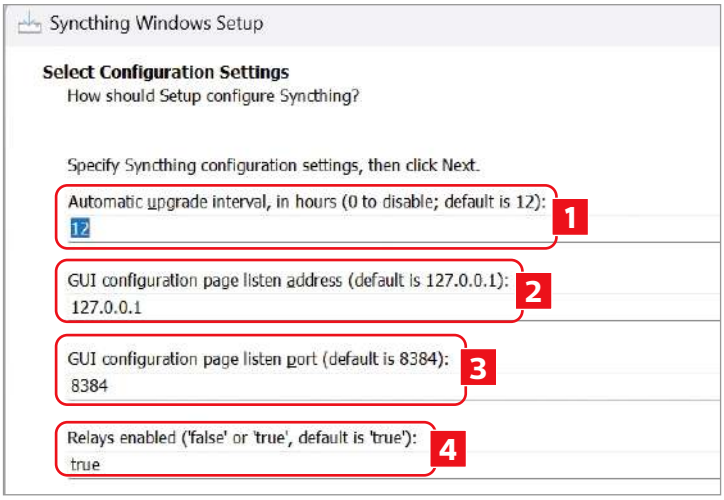
The 'GUI configuration page listen port' on the line below (8384) 3 more specifically targets a particular function running on your own machine – in this case, Syncthing.

To better understand what we're talking about, imagine your computer is a large building containing 10,000 offices. The building's street address is 127.0.0.1, and the office where you'll find the service with whom you want to do business is number 8384. If we were writing it on an envelope, we might address our mail to Suite 8384, 127001 High Street.

But, when typing it into a browser we can be more succinct and instead use the address 127.0.0.1:8384. If we type that once we've finished setting things up, we'll arrive at the Syncthing dashboard.

Finally, 'Relays enabled' is set to 'true' 4. This lets the tool use other Syncthing servers to transmit data between your devices if they can't see each other on your local network. Leaving this enabled (as is the default) makes Syncthing behave in a similar way to a traditional cloud-synchronisation service. However, if you only ever want to transmit data across your local network, set this to false, then see the box on opposite page for instructions to turn off Global Discovery.

Click Next and again leave options as they are on the following screen.



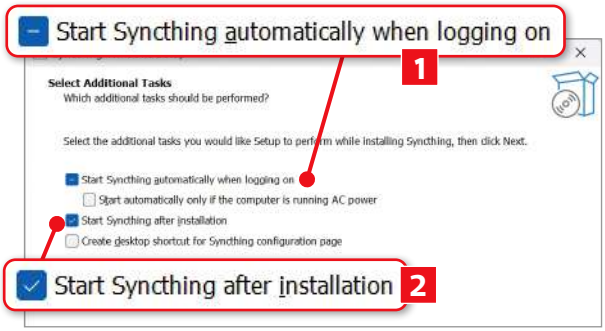
Familiarise yourself with the dashboard's web address and port

How I use Syncthing

I've been using Syncthing for several months to share files between Windows computers, PCs running Linux, a Mac and a Raspberry Pi. I initially set it up on the Raspberry Pi using an operating system called DietPi, but it's really no more difficult to do it on Windows, as you'll see here. Having a shared folder on all of my devices has greatly simplified my working life.

Nik Rawlinson

How do you sync files across your devices? Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

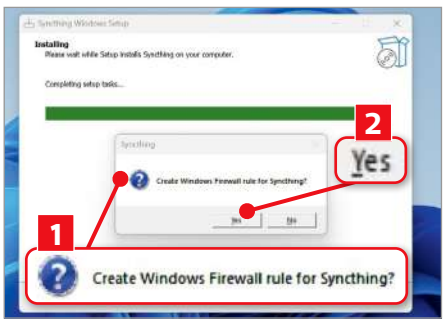

Start Syncthing automatically when logging on
1
Select Additional Tasks
Which additional tasks should be performed?
Select the additional tasks you would like Setup to perform while installing Syncthing, then click Next.
Start Syncthing automatically when logging on
Start automatically only if the computer is running AC power
Start Syncthing after installation
Create desktop shortcut for Syncthing configuration page
Start Syncthing after installation
2

Make sure Syncthing is set to launch when your computer starts

Specifically, check that Syncthing will start when logging on (1 in our screenshot above) and will start after installation 2. Click Next one final time, then Install.

Connections into and out from your computer are monitored by Windows Firewall, which will block unauthorised or unrecognised connections by default. Unless an exception is made for Syncthing, it would therefore not be able to communicate with the other computers on your network. As part of the installation process, it will ask if it should create a Windows Firewall rule for Syncthing (1 in our screenshot below). Click Yes 2 and, when Windows asks if you 'want to allow this app to make changes to your device', click Yes again.

That's the last thing you need to do. The installation routine will complete. Leave the box beside 'Open Syncthing



Click 'Yes' on this installation screen so Windows Firewall doesn't block Syncthing

configuration page' ticked and click Finish. Repeat this process on the other machines with which you want to synchronise your data.

2 Create username and password

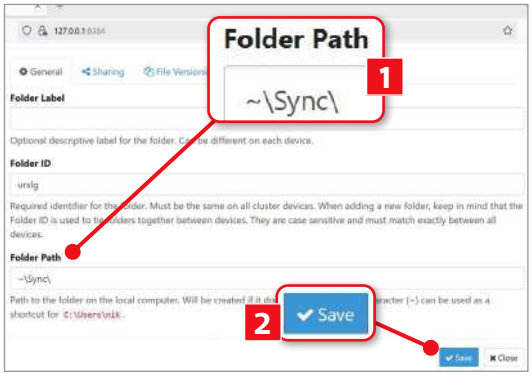
The first time you launch Syncthing, your browser may warn you that the connection is insecure. If you were connecting to a remote server this might be more of a worry, but here you're simply accessing files on your own machine. So, if you see the warning, click the option to continue.

Syncthing will ask if you're happy to allow anonymous usage reporting, which tells it how you use the software but without revealing your identity. Click Yes or No, depending on your preference.

Next, look at the green info box at the top of the screen warning that you've not set up a username and password for the GUI. The GUI is the Graphical User Interface, which you're looking at now. It's through this that you can control which machines are part of your synced network, so you really should protect it.

Click Settings, then switch to the GUI tab and enter a username in the GUI Authentication User box (1 in our screenshot below), and a password in the GUI Authentication Password box 2. Click Save and you'll be logged out. Use the credentials you just set to log back in.

You now need to specify which folder should be synchronised. Click '+ Add Folder', then click in the Folder Path box and type ~\Sync\ (1 in our screenshot above right). The tilde (~) is a shortcut to your user folder, and although the Sync folder you've just specified doesn't yet exist, Syncthing will create it. Click Save 2.

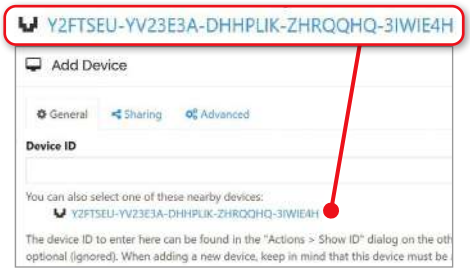


Syncthing will create your synchronised folder if it doesn't already exist.

3 Add more computers

If you've installed Syncthing on multiple computers, click '+ Add Remote Device'. Syncthing will look for other machines running the same software on your local network and – if it finds one – will display a long serial number made of letters and numbers (see screenshot below).

If there are several of these, that's because there's more than one other machine running on your network. If you're confused, load the same web page on your other machines (127.0.0.1:8384) and check in the This Device box (top right of the dashboard). There, you'll see seven blue letters and numbers to the right of the 'Identification' heading. Match this up with the first seven digits of the codes shown on the machine you were originally using so you know which one is which.



The long blue serial number represents another PC running Syncthing on our network

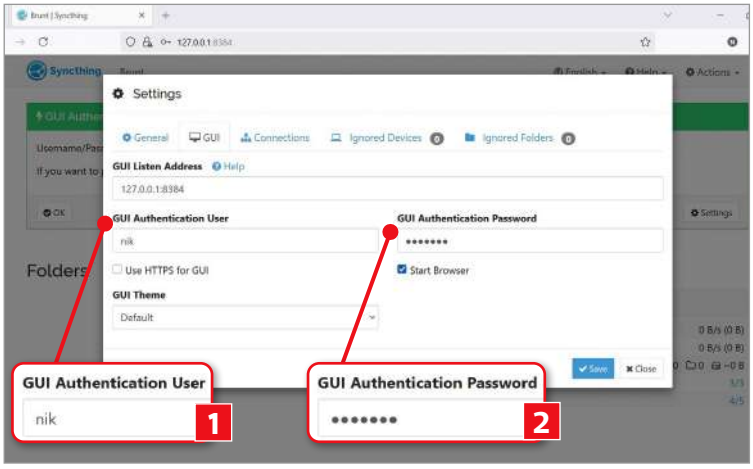
Click the serial number of the machine you want to add, and (optionally) give it a recognisable name, like 'Lenovo laptop'. Switch to the second machine and you'll see an alert at the top of the Syncthing page asking you to authorise the connection (1 in our screenshot above). Click '+ Add Device' 2 and the two machines will be allowed to share their data.

You'll now see the machine you just connected to in the Remote Devices panel on the right-hand side of the Syncthing dashboard 3 on each computer.

Finally, you need to share the synchronised folder on your first machine with the second. To do this, click the grey box below Folders on the left-hand side of the Syncthing dashboard, then click Edit. Switch to the Sharing tab and click in the box beside the name of the machine you just added, then click Save.

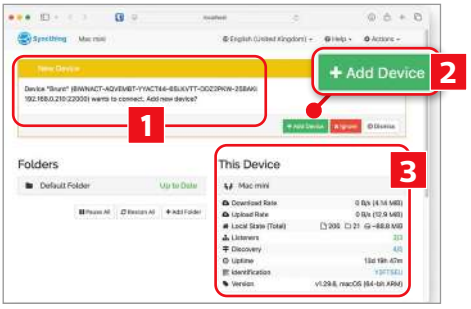
Now, any files you save (or copy) to the Sync folder inside your user folder on this machine will automatically appear in the synchronised folder of every other connected machine on your synchronised network.

Set a username and password to protect the Syncthing dashboard



Make sure data is only sent locally

We mentioned that there was a way to make sure your data only ever travelled on your local network. If you set 'Relays enabled' to 'false' when initially setting up Syncthing, you're halfway there. The other change you need to make is to turn off Global Discovery. To do this, click Actions in the top right of the Syncthing dashboard, then click Settings. Switch to the Connections tab and untick 'Global Discovery'. Click Save.



Click '+Add Device' and your two computers will be able to share your data

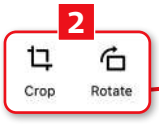
Scan and edit PDFs on your phone for free

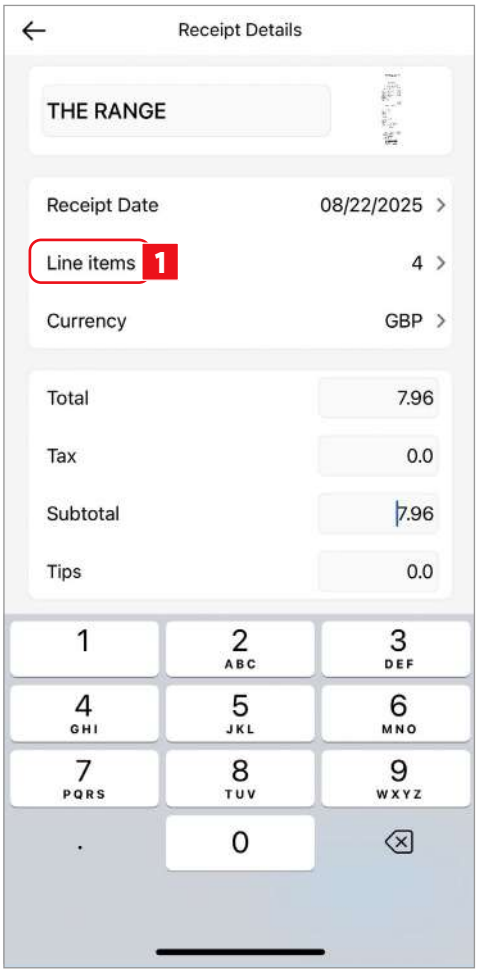
What you need: PDFgear Scan
Time required: 30 minutes

We've been longtime fans of PDFgear – the free tool for creating and editing PDFs in Windows – because it's easy to use and offers a superb range of features. It's recently added a companion phone app – PDFgear Scan – for Android (www.snipca.com/56123) and iOS (www.snipca.com/56124) which is also free. Here, we'll show you how you can use it to scan several types of document, sign a PDF without having to print it first, and automatically keep track of your spending over time.

STEP 1 Open the app and tap the relevant button for the type of document you want to scan. We're going to scan several receipts to help us keep track of our outgoings. Make sure the receipt is flat and in a well-lit area and point your phone at it. PDFgear Scan should automatically detect the edges of the receipt and colour it blue 1. Now hold the phone still and tap the shutter button 2 to capture the scan.

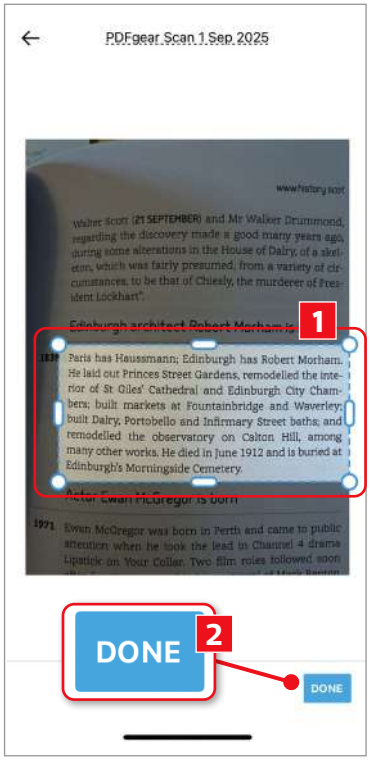
STEP 2 Next, tap the thumbnail of the receipt that appears in the bottom-right corner of the screen. Optionally, tap the title at the top of the screen 1 and change it to something more meaningful. If necessary, use the crop and rotate buttons 2 at the bottom to remove any surplus surroundings and make it easier to read. If the document still isn't clear, tap the various filters 3 to see if one of these improves the image. When you've finished, tap Done.

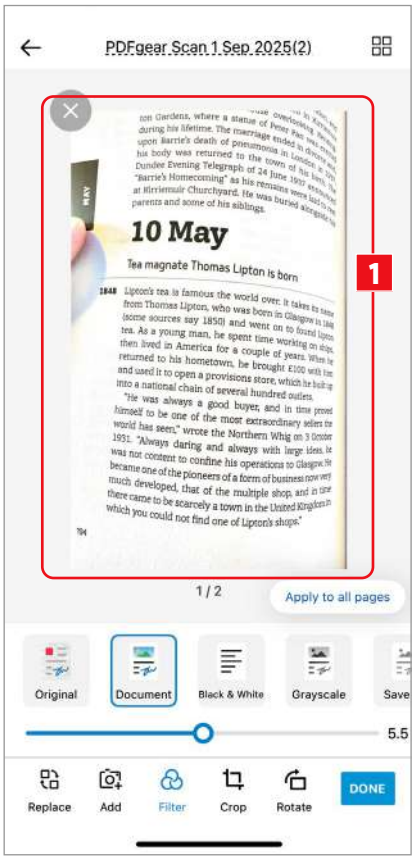




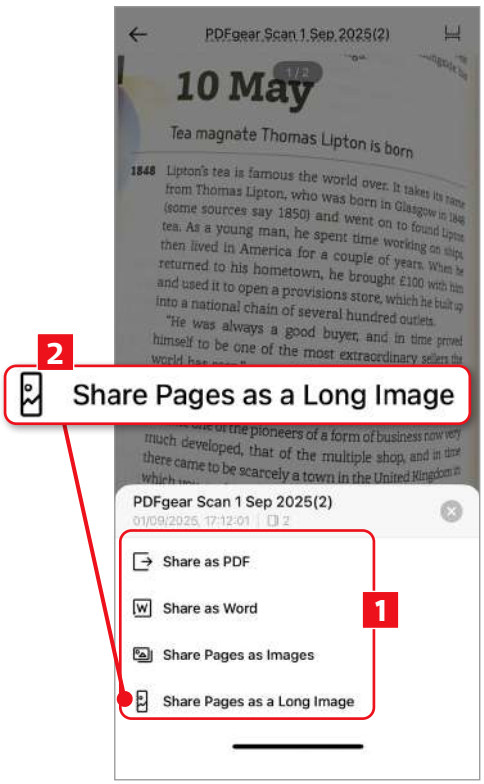
STEP 3 PDFgear Scan will read the scan and extract important information, such as listed items and their prices. Over time, it groups your receipts and keeps a running total. To check an individual receipt, tap it in the list of receipts to see what information it has extracted. If there's a mistake in the data, tap the relevant box and correct it. To see what items were shown on the receipt, tap the 'Line items' entry 1 where you can also make corrections to the extracted text.

STEP 4 PDFgear Scan can also extract text from documents, books, newspapers and more. Return to the home screen and tap the Extract Text button. Position the camera above the document, book or newspaper and press the shutter button, then tap the thumbnail of the captured image. Tap 'Crop' and drag the handles of the box 1 so its borders highlight only the text you want extracted. Now tap Done 2 and PDFgear Scan will extract the text. On the following screen, tap 'Copy text' and paste it into another app, or tap Export and choose either text or Word format.

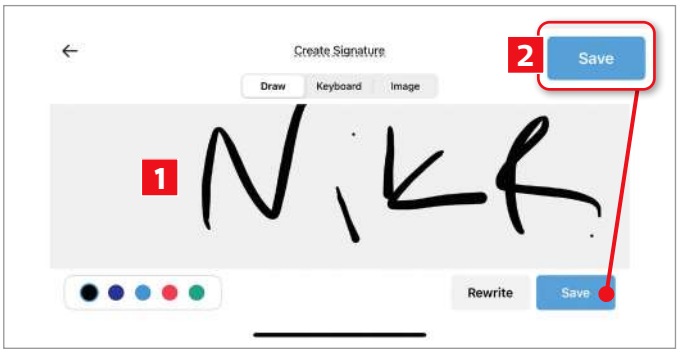




STEP 5 PDFgear Scan can merge multiple scans into a single long page. Tap 'More' in the document types, then scroll to the bottom of the options and tap 'PDF to Long Image'. Now make scans of a multi-page document, or sections of a map, for example. When you've finished, tap the thumbnail in the bottom-right corner, then (optionally) crop each one to remove unwanted areas (swipe the preview image 1 to view other pictures in the set).



STEP 6 Tap 'Done' and PDFgear Scan will combine your scans to produce a single long image. The scans will be arranged in the order you took them – with the first at the top of the page and most recent at the bottom (so it's important to capture them in the correct order). Now choose what you want to do with your finished image by tapping one of the options on the panel 1. If you choose 'Share Pages as a Long Image' 2 it will be created as a JPEG rather than a PDF.



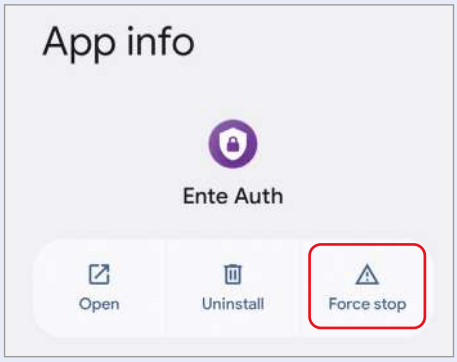
STEP 7 To sign a PDF, transfer it to your phone (or save it from an email), then tap '+' on the PDFgear Scan toolbar. Tap on your PDF to open it, then tap Done. Now tap Sign on the bottom toolbar. If you haven't created a signature yet, tap Create Signature, then draw a signature in the box 1 and tap Save 2. Tap the new signature, then tap where you'd like to place it in your document. Drag it to reposition, then tap More followed by 'Share as PDF'. The next time you need to add a signature it will insert the signature you've already created, allowing you to skip that step.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Open Ente Auth on the search bar every time

I've been impressed so far with Ente Auth (www.snipca.com/55931), which I installed on my Android phone after it won Gold in your review of authenticator apps (Issue 717, page 62). It has a decent number of useful settings which I'm surprised aren't turned on by default.



One of these always shows the search bar when you first open the app, meaning you don't need to tap to access it. This is handy if you need to quickly find your codes.

To turn it on, tap the top-left horizontal lines then General and turn on the 'Focus search on app start' slider so it turns purple. I can't take a screenshot of that because Ente forbids it, presumably for security reasons. That makes sense.

There's no 'save' option to confirm this change, so you need to 'force stop' the app instead. On Android, open Settings, then tap Apps and select Ente Auth. Now tap 'Force stop' (see screenshot) followed by OK. Launch the app again and it should open at the search bar.

Andrew Kane

Andrew wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD **Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433**

TV

Enter TV's Wi-Fi password using mini keyboard

We have a caravan and have to enter Wi-Fi passwords on the TV at every campsite, or if there is none then we have to log the TV on to one of our phone's hotspots. I got fed up with having to move to every letter of the password and even worse changing between upper and lower case.

To solve the problem I purchased a mini keyboard (£10 from www.snipca.com/56152, pictured above) with a USB dongle that plugs into any of the USB sockets on the TV. Now if I need to enter information on to the TV I simply switch on the keyboard and type it. I've tried this on several TVs and it works every time. I have another for the TV at home. If you remember to turn the keyboard off when you've finished, the batteries last for years.

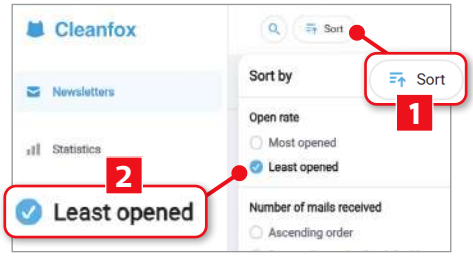
We now have Starlink satellite broadband which we'll probably use most of the time, but we still keep the little keyboard on the caravan and the dongle plugged in.

Julian Grieff

EMAIL

Sort newsletters to delete by least opened

Cleanfox (www.snipca.com/55531) makes it easy to remove newsletters you no longer need, so thanks for recommending it in Issue 715's Cover Feature on AI tools (page 56). Logically, you're more likely to unsubscribe from



Why I stopped using...

A laptop *and* a tablet

For years I've been using an Acer laptop at home (office and sofa) and an iPad when out and about (usually in our caravan). When both broke at the start of the summer, I shopped around for replacements.

And what I use instead...

I was about to press 'Buy' on a new iPad when my wife asked me why I didn't choose a foldable laptop instead. She doesn't usually pay much attention to my technology choices, so I asked what prompted her interest. She said her friend brought one to a local church meeting and demonstrated how the hinge turned the laptop into a tablet, and vice versa.

As I contemplated this advice, I flicked through Issue 716 of *Computeractive* and saw you gave a 'Buy It!' award to **Dell's 14 Plus 2-in-1 Laptop** (page 23). At £799 it was less than I'd have ended up spending on two separate devices.

It's surprisingly sturdy when in a 'tent' position (pictured), which is how I use it when watching videos. Its touchscreen responds well to my clumsy swipes and as a laptop it's fast with a long battery life. I should listen to my wife more often!

Adrian Lowe

Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

newsletters you rarely open. So when you open Cleanfox click the Sort button at the top (1 in our screenshot below left), then 'Least opened' 2.

When I did that I found several newsletters I had never opened, despite receiving them over 100 times. It made the decision to unsubscribe very easy.

Ruth Smith

DESKTOP

Show just Recycle Bin and two folders

Issue 715's How To recommended using the program Fences (www.snipca.com/55404) to keep your PC desktop tidy and organised. I don't need any programs to do this, and only have one file (Recycle Bin, 1 in our screenshot below) and two folders ('Occasional Access Files' 2 and 'Frequent Access Files' 3) on my desktop, making it probably the cleanest you've ever seen!

In the folders I simply create shortcuts to any files or folders to which I want quick access. I've done this in two folders so that when I'm looking for files or folders I frequently want to access I don't have a long list to trawl through. When I need to access files temporarily, I save them to one of the two folders on the desktop, rather than saving them elsewhere and creating a shortcut. Then I delete them when no longer needed.

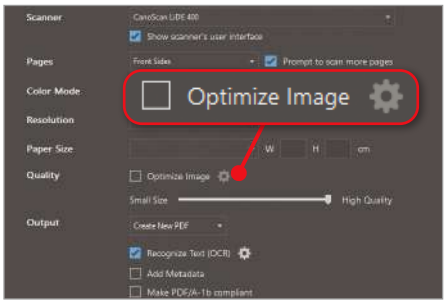
Some people might still find my desktop busy as I like using favourite art as wallpaper, but you can always turn this off. I find that having such a clean desktop helps me enjoy the artwork even more.

Graham Dragon

SCANNING

Back up your Acrobat configuration files

I've been using Adobe Acrobat and Canon scanners to scan documents for many years, but a recent change in one of Acrobat's updates caused scans to crash if you had the Optimize Image option selected. Not only does this crash Acrobat, it also replaces your custom configuration files with a default set you can't edit. To get it to scan properly, you need to deselect the Optimize image option in My Custom Settings in Acrobat (see screenshot above).



I discovered that you can make a backup of your configuration files and simply delete the 'new' ones, then copy your backups into the scanner folder and everything works okay again.

Simply make a backup of a working set of configuration files from **C:\Users\%userprofile%\AppData\Roaming\Canon\yourscannermodelnumber** and save them somewhere else. I've made a backup in the folder of my scanner as **C:\Users\%userprofile%\AppData\Roaming\Canon\LiDE 400\backup**.

Copy all of the files in your backup folder to **C:\Users\%userprofile%\AppData\Roaming\Canon\<yourscannermodel number** and that will restore all of the custom configurations.

Fraser Drummond

Reader recommends...

TP-Link TL-WR1502X AX1500 travel router

£37 from www.snipca.com/55046

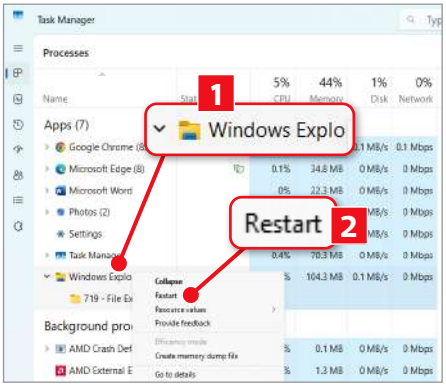
We've never found it easy to get Wi-Fi while camping, whether in the UK or Europe. That changed this summer when we bought TP-Link's TL-WR1502X travel router, which even got us connected while holidaying in Italy (albeit with a weaker signal than in the UK, where speed peaked at 100Mbps).

If you use it abroad, you can install a VPN on it. We kept in touch with UK news using this. We're taking it on a cruise this winter, so fingers crossed it'll work just as effectively, though we might have to wait until we've docked. We've only used it to connect a laptop and phone, but I'm sure it could handle more devices. Charging it with power banks is easy and it lasts a decent time.

It's so good I'm considering using it at home. Virgin recently sent me a Hub 3 router, which has done little to improve our speed. TP-Link's router surely can't be any worse.

Ray Poulter

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk



WINDOWS

Restart File Explorer to eject external drives

In Issue 714's Problems Solved (page 65) Robin Dew said that Windows wouldn't let him safely eject his external drive. I had exactly the same problem with my Seagate 4TB drive. The error appeared even if I plugged it in and removed it without opening any files.

I discovered that the culprit is File Explorer, which sometimes keeps hold of the drive even when no windows are open. The fix is to open Task Manager (press Ctrl+Shift+Esc), scroll down to Windows Explorer (1 in our screenshot above, partially obscured), right-click and choose Restart 2. After that, the drive can be ejected straight away without any error message.

Mike Sargent

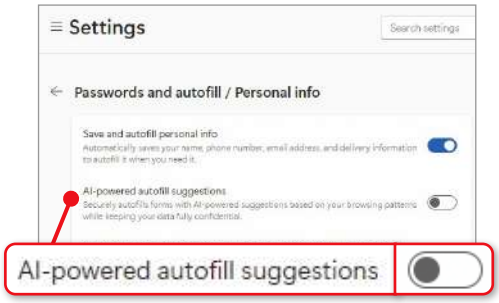
EDGE

Stop Edge using AI to auto-fill online forms

The auto-fill feature in browsers saves you having to type your name, email address and other personal details every time you fill in an online form. Edge 140 (released in August) introduces an additional auto-fill option, which "autofills forms with AI-powered suggestions based on your browsing patterns".

Although Microsoft claims it keeps your data "fully confidential", you may not feel comfortable with AI analysing your browsing activity. The new option should be disabled by default, but it's worth double-checking to stop unwanted entries appearing in forms.

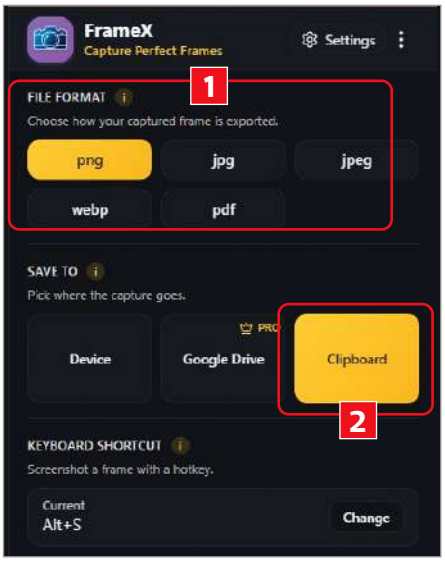
To do so, click Edge's three-dot menu button and choose Settings, then 'Passwords and autofill'. Select 'Personal info' and switch off 'AI-powered autofill suggestions' (see screenshot below).



CHROMIUM

Capture screenshots of online videos

The new extension FrameX (www.snipca.com/56096) offers an easy way to capture screenshots of online videos. It works on sites including YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, and even on streaming services that show a black screen when you try to take a screenshot.



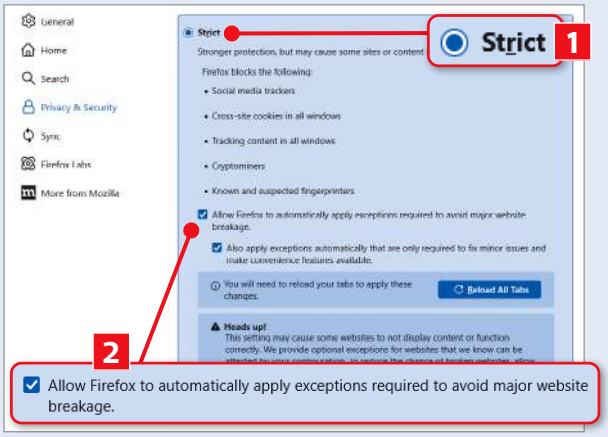
To use FrameX, simply click the camera button it adds to a video player's controls or to the top-right corner of a video. Alternatively, press the keyboard shortcut Alt+S. If you see a notification asking for permission to download files, click Allow.

By default, screenshots are downloaded to your PC in PNG format. Click the extension's toolbar button to save them in another format (1 in our screenshot left) or to copy grabs to your clipboard instead 2.

FIREFOX

Block trackers without breaking sites

The Enhanced Tracking Protection feature in Firefox blocks many trackers as you browse the web to stop them following you from site to site. Its Strict mode is particularly effective because it blocks trackers in standard browsing mode as well as private windows, and also blocks known and suspected fingerprinters.


General
Home
Search
Privacy & Security
Sync
Firefox Labs
More from Mozilla
Strict
1
Stronger protection, but may cause some sites or content
Firefox blocks the following:
Social media trackers
Cross-site cookies in all windows
Tracking content in all windows
Cryptominers
Known and suspected fingerprinters
Allow Firefox to automatically apply exceptions required to avoid major website breakage.
Also apply exceptions automatically that are only required to fix minor issues and make convenience features available.
You will need to reload your tabs to apply these changes.
Reload All Tabs
Heads up!
2
Allow Firefox to automatically apply exceptions required to avoid major website breakage.

The catch is that it can "cause some websites to not display content or function correctly". Firefox 142, released in August, fixes this problem by preventing website features from being broken by its Strict mode.

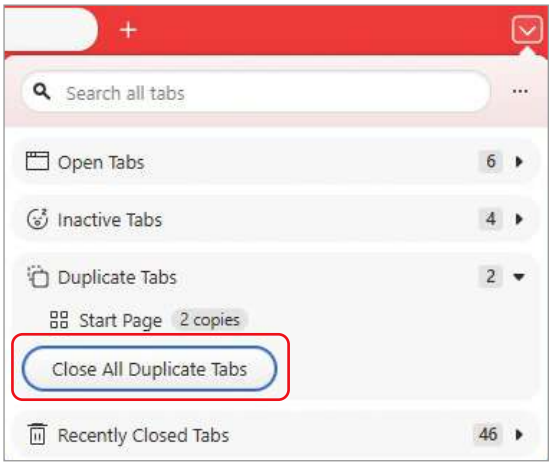
To enable the option, click the browser's three-line menu button and choose Settings, then 'Privacy & Security'. In the Enhanced Tracking Protection section, select Strict (1 in our screenshot) and tick the box next to 'Allow Firefox to automatically apply exceptions required to avoid major website breakage' 2.

You can also tick the box next to 'Also apply exceptions automatically that are only required to fix minor issues...', but this isn't as important. Click 'Reload All Tabs' to apply the changes.

VIVALDI

Manage multiple tabs more easily

Vivaldi is testing a new Tabs button that makes it easier to manage lots of tabs. It displays a full list of your open tabs; lets you search their titles; and lists recently closed tabs so you can reopen them with a single click.



Particularly useful is the ability to view and close inactive tabs to stop them hogging memory in the background. The Tabs button also identifies duplicate tabs, so you can close unnecessary copies (see screenshot above).

The feature is currently available only in the latest Snapshot (preview) version of Vivaldi (www.snipca.com/56098), but should come to the stable browser in due course.

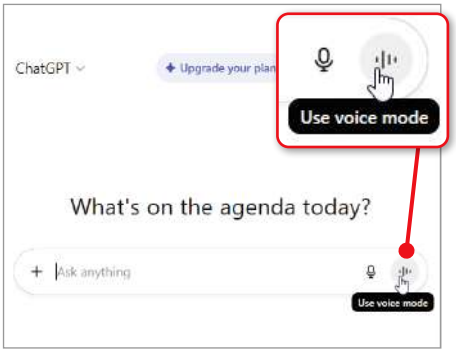
CHATGPT

Have more natural voice conversations

OpenAI has replaced ChatGPT's Standard and Advanced Voice Modes with ChatGPT Voice. This lets you engage in even more natural conversations with the chatbot, like you're talking to a real person.

ChatGPT Voice offers more emotional nuance, realistic pauses and emphasis, and a choice of nine voice characters, such as 'Easygoing and versatile'. These differ from the new personality types we wrote about in Issue 717 (page 6), which are limited to text chats. As before, to switch to voice mode, click or tap the 'Use voice mode' button in the search box (see screenshot below).

Previously, on ChatGPT's free plan you could chat with Advanced Voice Mode for 15 minutes per day, after which you were downgraded to Standard Voice. With ChatGPT Voice, once the 15 free minutes are up you won't be able to use it again until the next day.



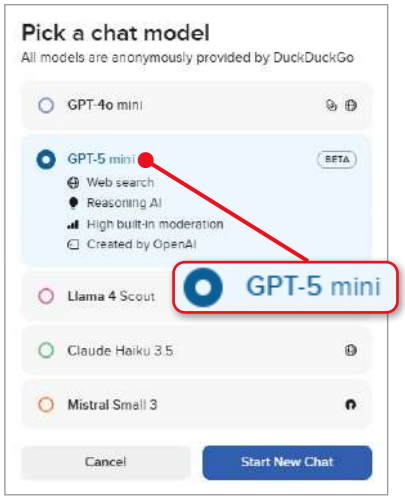
DUCK.AI

Chat privately using GPT-5 mini

DuckDuckGo has added a free version of the new GPT-5 large language model to its AI assistant Duck.ai (www.snipca.com/56102). This means you can get faster and more accurate responses, while maintaining your privacy – Duck.ai doesn't require an account and anonymises your chats.

You should see the option to try GPT-5 mini (the 'mini' version is lighter and speedier) on Duck.ai's homepage. If not, click the dropdown menu in the top-left corner, pick 'GPT-5 mini' (see screenshot right) as the chat model and click Start New Chat.

GPT-5 mini can't generate images or analyse files, but it's useful for private web searches and text conversations in Duck.ai.

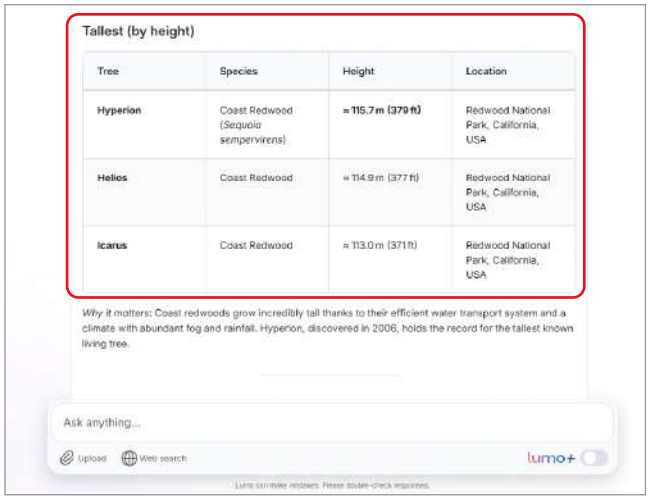


PROTON LUMO

Get higher-quality answers

We were initially underwhelmed by Proton's new AI assistant, Lumo (www.snipca.com/56103), aside from its focus on privacy – it doesn't store or train data on your chats. It's now been updated to Lumo 1.1, which makes a noticeable improvement to the quality of its answers.

You no longer need to clarify your queries to Lumo to get the information you want – it now (usually) provides relevant responses to your initial questions without asking for further details. Its answers are also more detailed and better presented – for example, it now uses tables to organise information (see screenshot below).


Tallest (by height)
Tree
Species
Height
Location
Hyperion
Coast Redwood (Sequoia sempervirens)
≈ 115.7 m (379 ft)
Redwood National Park, California, USA
Helios
Coast Redwood
≈ 114.9 m (377 ft)
Redwood National Park, California, USA
Icarus
Coast Redwood
≈ 113.0 m (371 ft)
Redwood National Park, California, USA
Why it matters: Coast redwoods grow incredibly tall thanks to their efficient water transport system and a climate with abundant fog and rainfall. Hyperion, discovered in 2006, holds the record for the tallest known living tree.
Ask anything...
Upload
Web search
lumo+

GEMINI

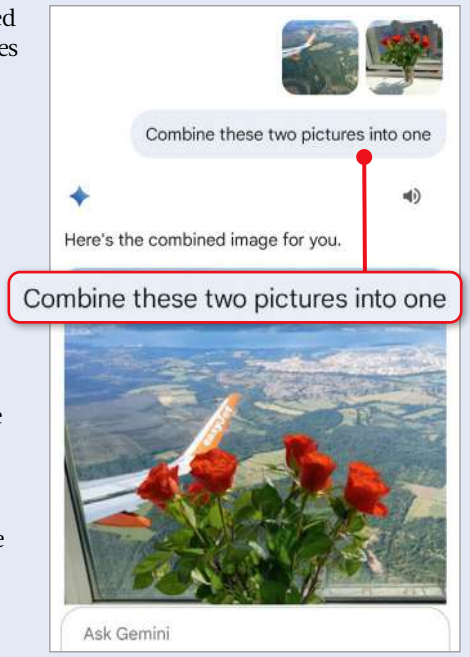
Blend multiple photos into one image

Google has significantly improved Gemini's image-editing capabilities using its new 2.5 Flash Image model (codenamed Nano Banana). Most notably, it can now blend multiple photos into one picture.

Upload two or more images, ask Gemini to combine them (see screenshot) and it will produce a new picture that blends the main elements of each – such as by placing the subject of one image on the background of another.

You can then download or share the result – note that Gemini applies a watermark to show content is AI-generated. The new feature also lets you apply the visual style of one image to an object in another,

Additionally, Gemini now keeps the subjects of pictures consistent when you try different edits. Previously, if you asked it to place a person on a new background, change their outfit or try other scenarios, their face would slightly change in the result. The new model ensures people look "consistently like themselves" in every image you create.

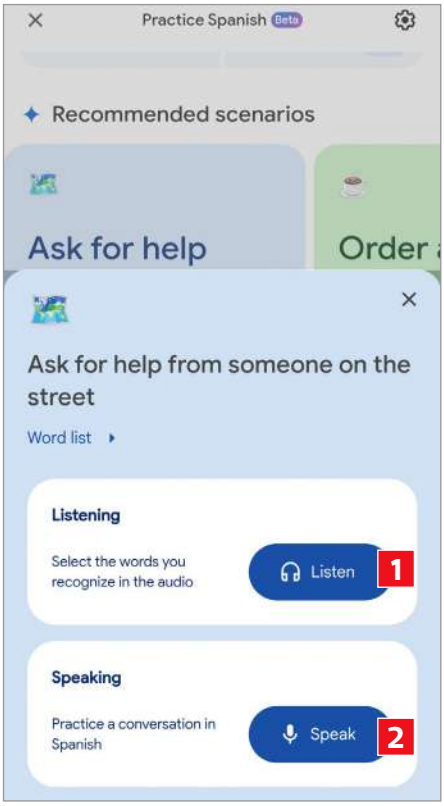


Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID & iOS

Learn a new language with Google Translate

Google Translate is taking on Duolingo with a new AI-powered feature that helps you learn a new language. Developed with language experts, this creates tailored listening and speaking practice sessions to "build the skills you need to communicate in another language with confidence".



To get started, press the new Practice button in the Google Translate app for Android (www.snipca.com/56108) or iOS (www.snipca.com/56109), and tap 'Get started'. Choose the language you want to practice – currently either Spanish or French – and select your skill level: Basic, Intermediate or Advanced.

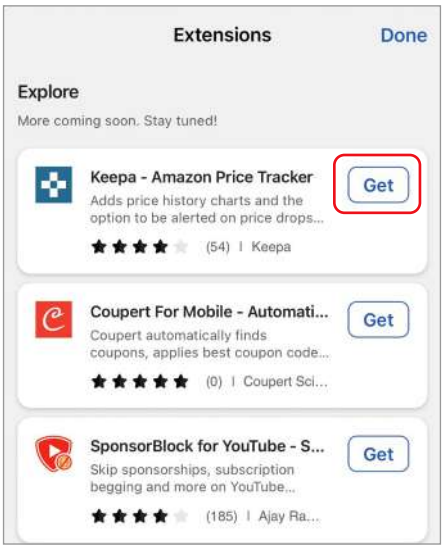
On the next screen, specify what's motivating you to learn that language, such as travelling to a new country or engaging in everyday interactions. Tap 'Start practising' and Google Translate will recommend scenarios, including things like asking for help from someone on the street or ordering food or drinks. You can also create your own practice scenario.

Tap 'Practice' to begin your learning session. Choose 'Listen' (1 in our screenshot left) and Google Translate will ask you to select the words you recognise in a short audio sample. Choose 'Speak' 2 to practice a simple conversation using hints. Google Translate helpfully provides a word list for each exercise.

ANDROID & iOS

Install extensions and search tabs in Edge

Microsoft has updated its Edge browser for iOS (www.snipca.com/56117) with support for extensions – a feature it added to the Android version (www.snipca.com/56118) in March. Currently, extensions are only available on iPhones, but they should hopefully come to iPads soon.


Extensions
Done
Explore
More coming soon. Stay tuned!
Keepa - Amazon Price Tracker
Adds price history charts and the option to be alerted on price drops...
(54) | Keepa
Get
Coupert For Mobile - Automati...
Coupert automatically finds coupons, applies best coupon code...
(0) | Coupert Sci...
Get
SponsorBlock for YouTube - S...
Skip sponsorships, subscription begging and more on YouTube...
(185) | Ajay Ra...
Get

To try the new feature, tap Edge's three-line menu button (bottom right) and select Extensions, then Manage Extensions. Find an extension you want to install (options include 'SponsorBlock for YouTube', 'I don't care about cookies' and 'Keepa – Amazon Price Tracker') and tap Get (see screenshot above). You can configure the extension's settings by selecting its name in the Extensions pop-up menu.

At the time of writing, there are only 12 to choose from, whereas Edge for Android has more than 30, including the ad blockers uBlock Origin Lite and AdGuard. More should be added to the iOS browser

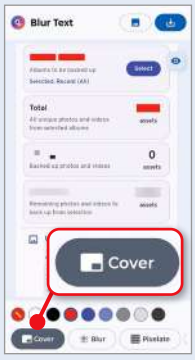
BEST NEW APPS What you should install this fortnight

Blur Text

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/56111

This handy app conceals sensitive data in your screenshots before you share them. Select an image, choose from options including Cover, Blur and Pixelate, then swipe the information you want to hide. Blur Text can also highlight, underline and add text. More tools are available in its ad-free Premium version, which costs £6.99.



Quasar - the Space App

Free

www.snipca.com/56125

This new alternative to the NASA app delivers the latest news about space exploration and astronomical discoveries in a pleasantly minimalist manner. You can read details of upcoming launches, search for information in the Space Wiki and download images to apply as wallpaper. It also has an AI assistant for space-related chats.

News
Scientists investigate moonquakes using Apollo 17 samples, LRO observations
What's Happening in Space Policy August 31-September 6, 2025

Reko Subscription Manager

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/56115

iOS www.snipca.com/56116

Reko offers an easy way to manage your subscriptions and keep track of how much you're paying and when. Select the services you subscribe to – including streaming, storage and VPN – then set up payment reminders. Reko has a US bias, though its prices are in sterling. Its free plan limits you to three subscriptions.

*Contains in-app purchases

in due course.

Both mobile versions of Edge have new tab-management tools. You can now search for keywords in the titles of open tabs, to find specific web pages more easily, and organise your tabs into themed, colour-coded groups. To access these options, tap the tab-switcher icon (the square with a number in it) on Edge's toolbar.

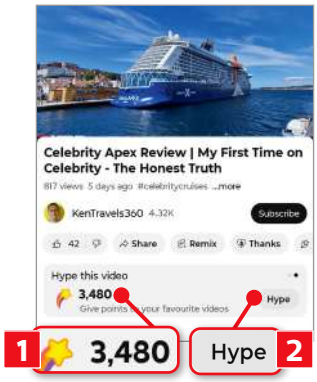
Additionally, the Android app has a redesigned Downloads hub that makes it easier to keep track of the files you download. Tap Edge's menu button and choose Downloads to open the hub.

ANDROID & iOS

Support YouTube creators by 'hyping' videos

YouTube has added a new Hype option to its Android and iOS app, to help support smaller creators. Each time you 'hype' a video, the YouTube channel that created it earns points that give it a chance of ranking on a new leaderboard.

However, there are a few conditions. You can only hype videos for YouTube channels that have between 500 and 500,000 subscribers, the video must have been uploaded within the last seven days and it needs to be a long-form clip rather than a YouTube Short.



To hype an eligible video, either swipe left on the Comments preview below the video player or press the Like button. This will open a 'Hype this video' card that shows how many points your Hype is worth (1 in our screenshot above). Tap the Hype button 2 to give the YouTube creator that reward.

You can view the Hype leaderboard by tapping the compass icon to open the Explore menu and selecting Hype. This ranks the top 100 hyped videos and lists the clips you've hyped yourself.

iOS

Change your iPhone's lock-screen buttons

The lock screen on your iPhone provides shortcuts to the built-in torch and camera, to save you unlocking the device every time you want to use those features. But if you'd prefer to have different shortcut buttons on the lock screen, you can change them.

A new option quietly introduced in iOS 18 lets you customise your iPhone's lock screen (but not your iPad's) with the buttons of your choice. To do so, long-press the lock screen, tap the Customise button and select the Lock Screen tile.

Remove the torch or camera button by tapping its minus-sign icon (1 in our screenshot right), then tap the plus-sign icon. This will open a screen of Control Centre shortcuts where you can select a replacement lock-screen shortcut. Options include Calculator, Alarm, Stopwatch, Dark Mode and Recognize Music (using Shazam 2).

Tap a shortcut to add it to your iPhone's lock screen, then either replace the other default button or tap Done to finish. You can restore the torch and camera shortcuts if you change your mind later.

BEST APPS FOR... Rain and flood warnings

Rain Alarm

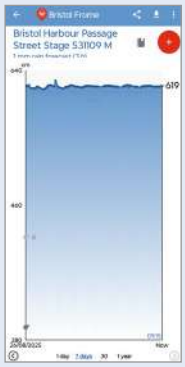
Free*
Android www.snipca.com/56127
iOS www.snipca.com/56128
This weather app notifies you when rain is approaching so you know when to grab your umbrella. Rain Alarm's alerts tell you the proximity and intensity of the downpour, while its colour-coded map displays its data visually. You need to grant the app background access to your location, and pay £1.79 a month for advanced options and no ads.
Best For Receiving rain alerts

Rain Viewer

Free*
Android www.snipca.com/56129
iOS www.snipca.com/56130
Rain Viewer goes further than Rain Alarm by warning you when heavy rain is within a specific radius and severe weather is expected. You can customise its map to show radar and satellite imagery, a 72-hour forecast, real-time cloud cover and precipitation data from individual weather stations. Pay £13.99 a year to remove ads and track storms.
Best For Detailed rain maps

FloodAlert

Free*
Android www.snipca.com/56133
iOS www.snipca.com/56134
FloodAlert (called PegelAlarm on iOS) provides alerts about rising water levels from over 30,000 monitoring stations around the world. Tap one on the map to view a rain forecast and receive a notification when the water threshold reaches a critical level. The Pro version costs £1.79 a month and delivers warnings by text.
Best For Flood warnings

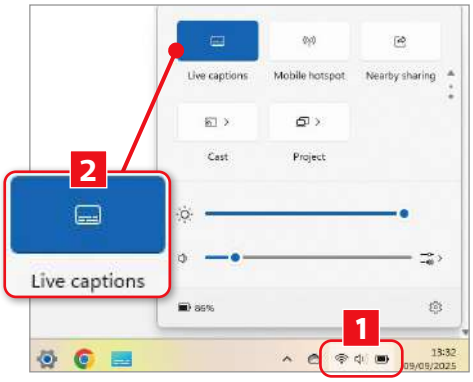


*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 11

Turn on live captions from system tray

The keyboard shortcut Windows key+Ctrl+L turns on live captions in Windows 11, showing subtitles on screen for any spoken audio playing on your PC, whether that's a video (saved or online) or a call. There's another way to turn them on if you can't remember that shortcut or find it tricky to press. Click the 'Quick Settings' icons at the bottom right of your system tray (1 in our screenshot below) to make the box appear, then scroll down and click the 'Live captions' button so it turns blue 2. You then need to click 'Yes, continue' at the top to confirm.



WINDOWS 11

Join Wi-Fi network with a QR code

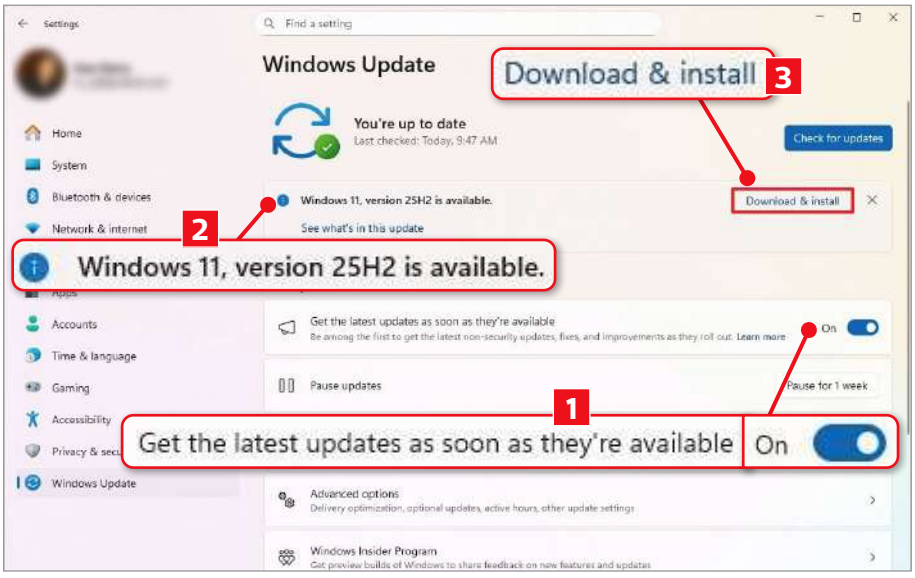
If you're using your laptop in public and trust the Wi-Fi network, you can connect to it by scanning its QR code (assuming it has one). Search for and open the Camera app then point it at the QR code. Click the notification that appears to join the network. Only QR codes that connect to Wi-Fi will work.

WINDOWS 11 INSIDER

Install 25H2 feature update

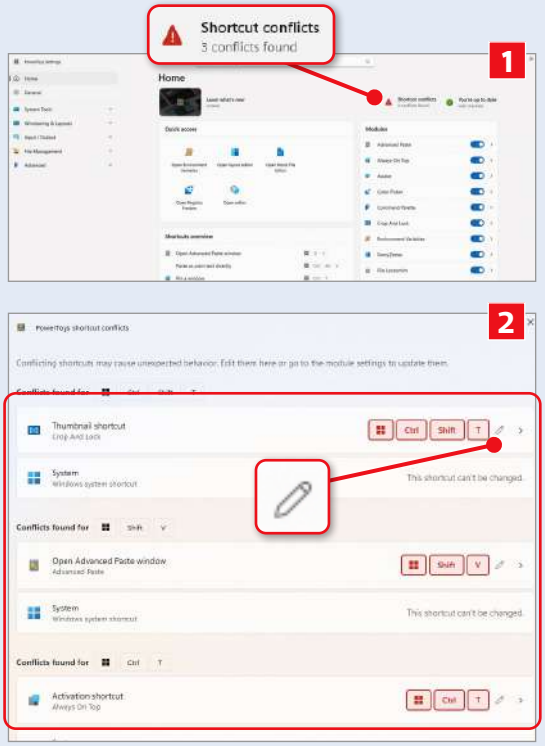
Microsoft has made the final preview version of Windows 11 25H2 available for all Insiders to download. Press Windows key+I then click Windows Update on the left. Now turn on 'Get the latest updates as soon as they're available' (1 in our screenshot right) then click 'Check for updates' above. Windows will first make sure you're fully updated on 24H2. Once that's done, you'll see 'Windows 11, version 25H2' listed 2. Click 'Download & install' 3 followed by Restart when prompted.

Note that 25H2 doesn't add any new features – it merely contains everything that's been installed so far in previous 24H2 updates. You'll need to update to it at some point, so you might feel there's no need to wait. However, feature updates can cause severe problems on computers, as we saw last October with the messy release of 24H2. We'll explain soon how to delay the release when it starts rolling out to everyone.



WINDOWS 10 & 11

See your keyboard shortcut conflicts in PowerToys



Version 0.94 of PowerToys, released in September, shows whether any of your keyboard shortcuts conflict with each other by doing two different things at once. This is a distinct possibility because PowerToys shares many of the same shortcuts as common Windows commands.

Open PowerToys and you should see a prompt to update it – if not click 'Check for updates' in the General section. Once it's been updated, click Home at the top left and PowerToys will show whether you have any conflicts (see screenshot 1). Click this warning and you'll see details of those conflicts.

In screenshot 2, for example, we have three conflicts. Most of the shortcuts for Windows can't be changed, so instead you'll have to click the pencil icon to change the shortcut used by PowerToys.

If you haven't downloaded PowerToys, visit www.snipca.com/56223 and choose your download option – it's most likely to be 'Per user – x64'.

LIBREOFFICE

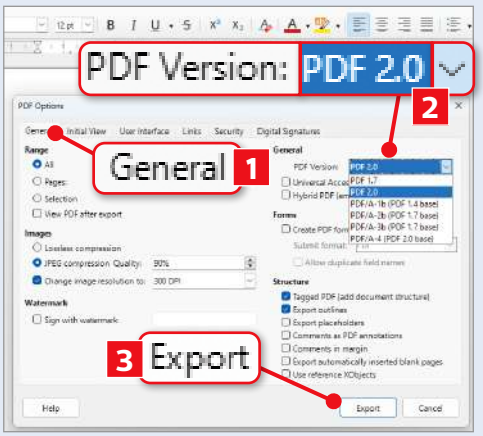
Export files in PDF 2.0 format

The new version of LibreOffice (25.8, www.snipca.com/56105, released in August), finally adds support for PDF 2.0. This is the latest PDF standard, approved back in 2017. It uses stronger encryption, making it harder for anyone to edit your PDFs without permission. It also works more consistently across different operating systems, software and devices – so fonts, images and layouts appear as you want them to.

PDF 2.0 files are backwards compatible, so they can be opened in most older PDF software – though you won't benefit from the new features. These also include tags that help screen readers understand headings, emphasis and structure, as well as the ability to embed files directly inside the PDF. Plus, files stored as PDF 2.0 are likely to remain readable for longer than previous standards.

To export as PDF 2.0, click 'File' at the top left then select Export As, followed by 'Export as PDF'. Make sure the General tab is selected (1 in our screenshot) then choose PDF 2.0 in the 'PDF Version' dropdown menu 2 (the previous standard, PDF 1.7, is also an option). Make any other changes you need. Finally, click Export 3.

Note that LibreOffice 25.8 is the first version not to work on Windows 7, 8 and 8.1, nor on 32bit systems.

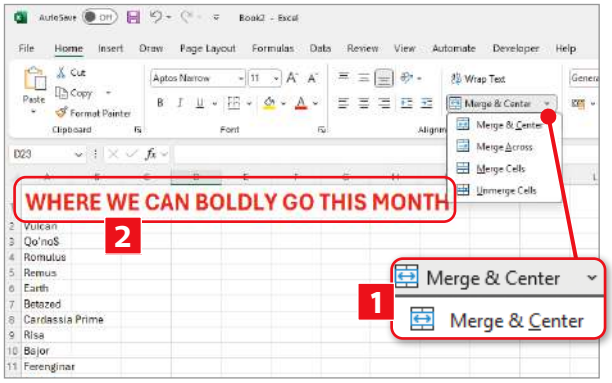


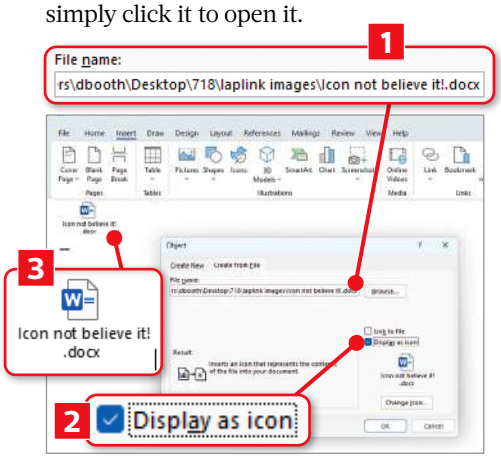
MICROSOFT WORD

Link to documents using icons

You can link to a Word document within another by adding an icon. First, save the document you want to link to. Now open a fresh document and place your cursor where you want the icon to go. Next, click Insert at the top followed by the Object dropdown menu, then Object again.

In the Object box, switch to the 'Create from File' tab then find your document on your computer and double-click it. It will appear in the 'File name' box (1 in our screenshot below). Now tick 'Display as icon' 2 and click OK. Your document will appear as a Word icon 3. Now simply click it to open it.





MICROSOFT EXCEL

Create a bold heading for your spreadsheet

You can easily create a bold heading for your spreadsheet above the data in the cells. Navigate to the top of your sheet then right-click and select Insert followed by 'Entire row'.

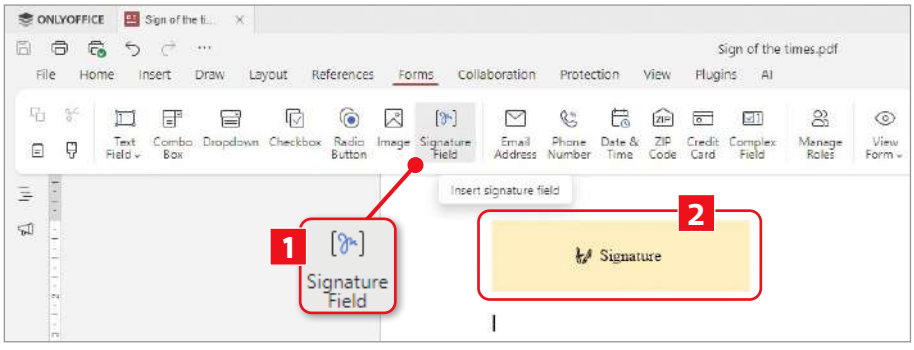
Next, select cell A1 and type your heading. Now select the range of cells to contain the spreadsheet title. Finally, click the Home tab, then the Merge & Center dropdown menu and 'Merge & Center' within that (1 in our screenshot). Your heading will be centred across your chosen cells.

To make the title stand out even more, increase the font size, use bold formatting (press Ctrl+B), and choose a distinctive colour 2.

ONLYOFFICE

Always show signature boxes in forms

Version 9.0 of OnlyOffice, released in June, makes the signature box in forms more prominent. You'll see this by clicking Forms at the top then Signature Field (1 in our screenshot below). A pale yellow box will appear with a pen icon and the word 'Signature' 2, making it obvious where you have to sign. This will remain shown in the form. In previous versions of OnlyOffice you had to click on the form for the signature box to appear.



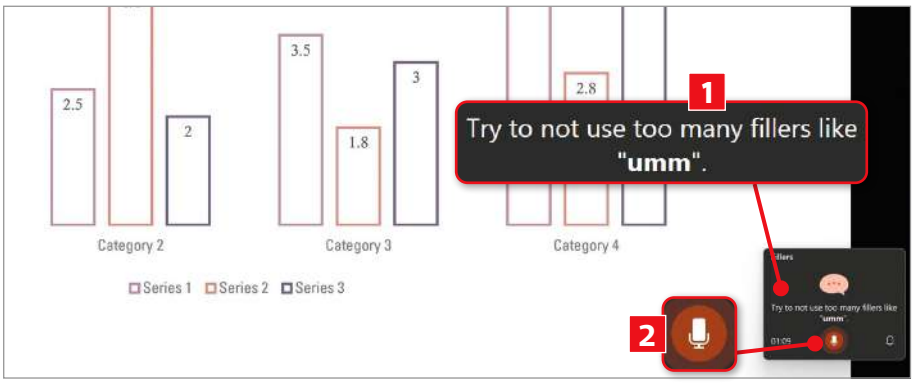
In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Rehearse presentations in PowerPoint

Running a club often means giving presentations – welcoming newcomers, guiding members through slideshows, hosting the annual general meeting and so on. Microsoft PowerPoint makes it easy to create presentations, but delivering them confidently is another matter entirely. Without preparation you might stumble, mumble or rush your talks.

Microsoft's Speaker Coach can help. Formerly called Presenter Coach, it's built into Microsoft 365 PowerPoint (the subscription version of Office) as well as PowerPoint for the web (www.snipca.com/56151). It listens as you rehearse, giving instant feedback on pace, tone, filler words, and whether you're reading too much from your slides.



Notifications appear at the bottom right of your presentation

Set up your mic and start speaking

You'll need a microphone (or a webcam with a built-in mic) to use Speaker Coach. Press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click System on the left followed by Sound in the middle. Look under the 'Input' heading to configure and test your microphone before you start.

When you're ready, open your presentation in PowerPoint, then click the Slide Show tab at the top, followed by 'Rehearse with Coach'. You'll see a Welcome prompt – make sure the option to 'Show real-time feedback' is ticked (1 in our screenshot below), then click Start Rehearsing 2.

Now deliver your presentation as if you were speaking in front of your audience. Speaker Coach will listen and give feedback. Look for small notifications at the bottom right, such as 'Try to not use too many fillers, like "umm"' (1 in our screenshot above). If you need a break, pause your rehearsal by clicking the microphone icon 2.

Speaker Coach will present its results in a Rehearsal Report

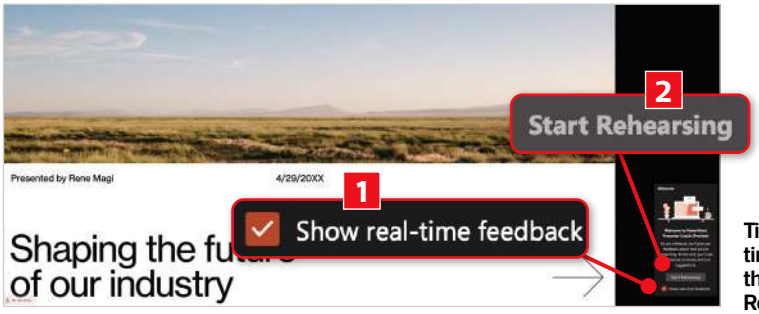
Read your 'Rehearsal Report'

When you've finished rehearsing your presentation, PowerPoint will present you with a Rehearsal Report. You'll see how long your presentation lasted and how many slides you included (1 in our screenshot above right). Under 'Pace', you'll see how fast your delivery was in words per minute 2. A further graph below this 3 shows how your pace varied over the entire running time of your presentation.

Scroll down and you'll find another graph that charts your pitch variation over the presentation, so you can pinpoint whether you sounded a bit too flat at any point. The report will offer further insights, such as whether you relied too much on repetitive phrases, used filler words or simply read text straight from your slides.

If the feedback suggests there's room for improvement, click the Rehearse Again button 4 and run through your slides once more. With each session, Speaker Coach monitors and analyses your delivery, helping you build confidence.

When it's time for the real thing, consider turning on Speaker Coach during your live presentation. As long as you're using a second screen, such as a TV set or projector to present to your members, the real-time prompts and advice will be seen only on your own laptop screen, and could provide a useful safety net to help keep your delivery bubbling along smoothly.



Tick 'Show real-time feedback' then click Start Rehearsing

Next issue: Create documents members can sign digitally

What's All the Fuss About...

Direct to Device

You may soon be able to make phone calls by satellite

What is it?

A technology that connects mobile phones to satellites so they can make calls and browse the internet. It can provide a signal in remote areas where phone masts don't reach.

How does it work?

Your smartphone sends a signal using standard mobile frequencies (for example, 4G and 5G). This is received by a satellite which transmits the signal to a ground station that's connected to the mobile-network infrastructure. This bypasses phone masts.

Sounds clever. Is it already being used?

Yes, in trials in India, Luxembourg, Turkey and the US. But no country in Europe has authorised its use yet – and telecoms regulator Ofcom wants the UK to be the first.

What's it planning?

It wants Direct to Device (D2D) to be working by early 2026, and has set rules so mobile networks can legally share their frequencies with satellites. Users will then be able to connect their phones directly to D2D services without breaking the law. Before that though, it's seeking advice to make sure signals don't interfere with Air Traffic Control (ATC) radar systems.

Yes, that wouldn't be good. What's the risk?

Ofcom wants D2D signals to use the 2.6GHz radio band, which is close to the bands used by ATC to track planes. If they overlap, ATC staff might see the wrong information on their screens, such as planes appearing in the wrong place, or even false alerts where 'ghost' planes appear.

Starlink is planning to bring its 'Direct to Cell' service to the UK

Would you need a new phone?

No, D2D works on any standard 4G or 5G phone. But communications companies will need to develop satellite networks that use the same frequencies your phone already does. For example, Starlink is looking to bring its 'Direct to Cell' network (www.snipca.com/56256, pictured below left) in the US to the UK. Starlink is the biggest provider of satellite broadband in the UK, so moving into D2D makes perfect sense. Additionally, Vodafone is working with AST SpaceMobile to sell satellite connections as a premium feature.

Wait – don't some phones already connect to satellites?

Yes, but that's different. Apple added the 'Emergency SOS' feature to iPhone 14 (2022), which uses a dedicated satellite frequency not used by mobile networks (see www.snipca.com/56254). Apple had to design special antennas and software to point the phone at satellites. It's only meant for sending short text messages in emergencies, not making phone calls or browsing the web. Google added a similar service to Pixel 9 phones (www.snipca.com/56255) – and it's been kept for the 10th generation (see review on page 24).

So what happens now?

Ofcom is running a consultation with interested parties, including ATC and networks, until 10 October (www.snipca.com/56249). But it feels like a formality. As well as improving mobile coverage, Ofcom is convinced D2D will boost the economy by encouraging "investment and innovation" that "unlocks" the potential of IoT devices.

What are they?

Internet of Things. It's a clunky phrase that describes internet-connected devices other than phones, tablets and computers. Direct to Device should in particular help businesses and factories run web-connected gadgets like sensors, trackers and meters. But day to day, most users will simply benefit from stronger signals in remote locations. Hopefully, it'll mean you'll get a connection without waving your phone in the air like a magic wand while standing on tiptoes.

BEST NEW TV APPS

Don't limit your viewing to the same old broadcasters and streaming services. **Robert Irvine** recommends 22 new and updated TV apps to enhance your entertainment

TV-streaming services have now overtaken traditional television in popularity in the US, Canada and Germany – and the UK isn't far behind. Recent research by Ofcom found that only 56 per cent of us still watch TV as it's broadcast, and that YouTube now has more viewers than ITV, with more of us watching it on our TVs (www.snipca.com/56211).

WHAT THE LOGOS MEAN

We've used company logos to indicate which smart TVs and streaming sticks the apps we've recommended are available on. We've provided links to the apps' websites, but the quickest way to install them is to search the app store on your device.

- Amazon Fire TV sticks, Fire TV Cube and Fire TV sets
- Android TV or Google TV, including TVs from Sony, Panasonic and Philips; 'Chromecast with Google TV' and Google TV Streamer
- Apple TV set-top boxes, such as Apple TV 4K
- Freely TVs from brands such as Bush, Toshiba and Hisense
- LG TVs, which use the company's WebOS operating system
- Roku streaming sticks and TVs, including JVC and TCL models
- Samsung TVs, which use the company's Tizen operating system
- Sky Q, Sky Stream and Sky Glass TVs
- Virgin Media's Virgin TV 360 and Virgin Stream

Although there are plenty of services to choose from, most of us tend to use the apps that came installed on our smart TVs, streaming sticks and set-top boxes. That's a shame because lots of great TV apps are launched every year, which are easy to install from your device's app store.

These apps often offer programmes and films you won't find elsewhere, either 'live' (on a schedule), on-demand or both. Some services even provide their content for free on FAST channels, if you don't mind sitting through ads – which you already do on non-BBC terrestrial channels. However, because they don't appear on your TV's home screen, you may not realise they exist, which means you're missing out on some top-quality entertainment.

Here, we recommend the best new and updated TV apps from the past year, and new channels you can watch without an aerial. They bring you classic British TV shows, Hollywood films, sporting highlights, local radio and more, as well as practical benefits, like viewing the weather forecast.

BEST NEW APPS FOR FILMS & TV SHOWS

Tubi

www.snipca.com/56153

Tubi is undoubtedly the biggest and best new streaming service. Launched in the UK last summer, it's completely free to watch (supported by ads), and its thousands of films and TV shows include recent and acclaimed titles you'll actually have heard of – unlike most free services.

You don't even need to create an account to use Tubi, though doing so lets you set up a watchlist and resume viewing where you left off. Its UK movie library is constantly updated and was expanded in June following deals with major studios such as AMC Networks, Lionsgate and Sony Pictures Entertainment.

At the time of writing, Tubi highlights included the Oscar-nominated *Foxcatcher* (2014), action thriller *Angel Has Fallen* (2019, pictured above right) and the BBC TV series *Robin Hood* (2006).

Tubi recently added more free films from major studios to its library, including *Angel Has Fallen*

Roku Live TV

www.snipca.com/56154

The Roku Channel on Roku streaming devices offers a selection of free films and TV shows for UK viewers, but it's rather poor compared with the US version. That's set to change in October with the introduction of 40 new TV channels, spanning entertainment, lifestyle, classic TV, documentaries and more.

These are FAST (free ad-supported streaming television) channels, which means you'll need to put up with ads, and are accessible through both the Roku Channel and a new Live TV zone (see screenshot of the US version below).

They include This Old House for home-improvement shows, Unsolved Mysteries for true-crime fans and NatureTime for wildlife documentaries.

Roku also has a new streaming service called Howdy (www.howdy.tv), with over 3,000 films and TV shows and no ads. It's currently only available in the US, priced at $3 per month, but you can watch it in your browser using a VPN (you can't install VPNs on Roku devices).

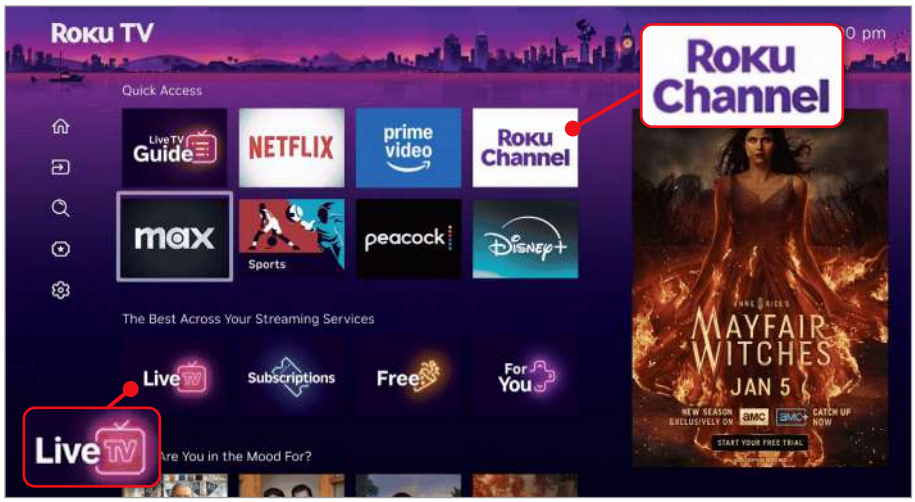
A Taste of Disney on ITVX

www.snipca.com/56156

ITVX and Disney+ have teamed up to make selected content available on each other's services. This is exciting for ITVX viewers who don't want to pay for a Disney+ subscription, because you can watch the Disney-owned TV shows and films for free.

Stream Disney+ TV shows and films without a subscription through ITVX

Scroll down the Home screen in the ITVX app to find the new 'A Taste of Disney+' section (see screenshot above). The choice of titles is regularly refreshed. At the time of writing it included the first series of the award-winning *Only Murders in the Building* starring Steve Martin and the *Star Wars* spin-off *Andor*, as well as season 11 of *Futurama*.



Watch 40 free TV channels on the Roku Channel and in a new Live TV zone

Samsung TV Plus

www.snipca.com/56157

The built-in Samsung TV Plus app includes hundreds of free (FAST) TV channels and recently added even more. These include RugbyPass TV (channel 4608, see screenshot on page 52), which features international rugby action, classic matches and rugby documentaries; and LADbible (4093), which offers quirky entertainment programming such as *Jury Room*, a debate show that "takes on issues the public cannot agree on".

There are also new FAST channels for BBC property series *Escape to the Country* (4087) and long-running US quiz show *Family Feud* (4122), which *Family Fortunes* is based on.

Samsung TV Plus has new FAST channels, including RugbyPass TV

TalkSport

www.snipca.com/56158

The world's largest sports radio station is now available on your TV, both as an app and a FAST channel (on Samsung TV Plus and LG Channels). This means you can now watch as well as listen to TalkSport shows on your big screen, and see presenters including Alan Brazil, Ally McCoist and Jeff Stelling engage in 'feisty debates' about football (mostly).

In addition to programmes already screened on the TalkSport website and YouTube channel, there are new shows such as *The Kick Back*, focusing on women's football, and *The Final Whistle* (see screenshot below), which delivers match results as they come in.

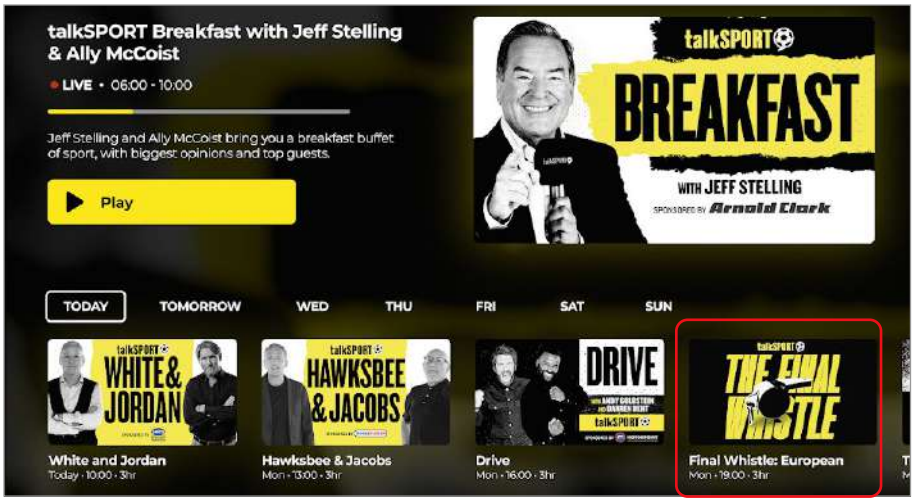
You can also watch club-specific content from *Inside Devils*, *Inside Gooners* and *Inside Chelsea*, and boxing discussion on *TalkBoxing*. The TalkSport app lets you view shows on-demand, as well as stream them live.

British Screen Classics

Free streaming services are dominated by schlocky American movies, so we're pleased the balance has been slightly redressed by British Screen Classics. This new FAST channel features vintage British films from the production and distribution companies StudioCanal and ITV Studios.

British Screen Classics is available on Samsung TV Plus, LG Channels and (as of June) Virgin TV, and through the Pluto TV app on other smart TVs and streaming sticks. Recent highlights include Noel Coward comedy *Blithe Spirit* (1945), Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (1944, pictured below left) and John Cleese in *Clockwise* (1986). The channel operates 24 hours a day, with new (albeit old) films added regularly,

British Screen Classics shows vintage British films – such as *Henry V* – 24 hours a day



TalkSport's new TV app provides live video streams of its radio shows

TPTV Encore

www.snipca.com/56159

Talking Pictures TV is a brilliant place to watch classic British TV shows and films, as well as fondly remembered American series such as *Bonanza* and *Batman*. The channel is available on Freeview (channel 82), Sky, Virgin, Freesat and YouView, and last December launched TPTV Encore for mobile and streaming devices.

The TPTV Encore app lets you watch classic TV shows on-demand

This free app lets you watch selected programmes and movies on-demand, currently including *Worzel Gummidge* and *Maigret* (see screenshot above), so you can catch up if you missed them when broadcast on the main channel. Subscribe for £4.99 a month to remove ads and access exclusive content for series such as *Thunderbirds* and *Rumpole of the Bailey*.

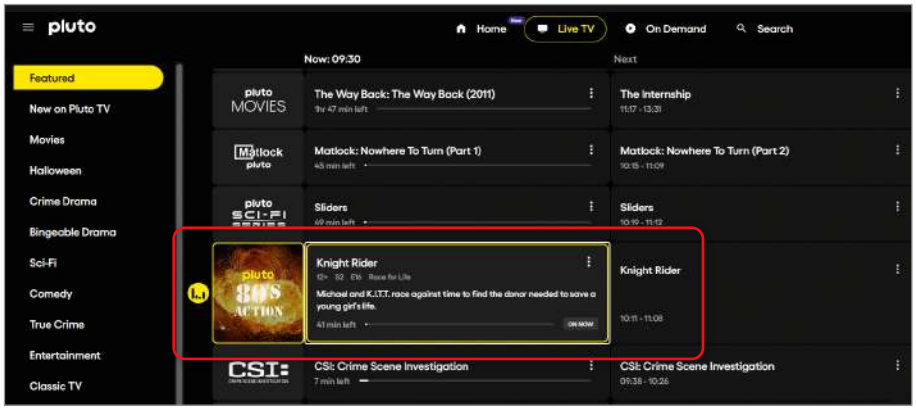
Pluto TV

www.snipca.com/56160

Pluto TV is one of the few streaming services that keeps improving both the quality and quantity of its content. It remains completely free with no need to register for an account, unless you want to save your favourite channels and sync your viewing across devices.

You can now watch over 250 FAST channels on Pluto TV, and more than 20,000 hours of on-demand content. In the past year, it's added lots more, thanks partly to a deal with NBCUniversal.

New channels include Pluto 80s Action, which streams shows like *Knight Rider* (see screenshot above right), *The A-Team*



Pluto TV has lots of great free channels including the new Pluto 80s Action

and *Miami Vice*; Pluto Sci-Fi Series (*Quantum Leap*, *Sliders* and *Battlestar Galactica*); and – until the end of October – horror-themed content on Pluto Halloween.

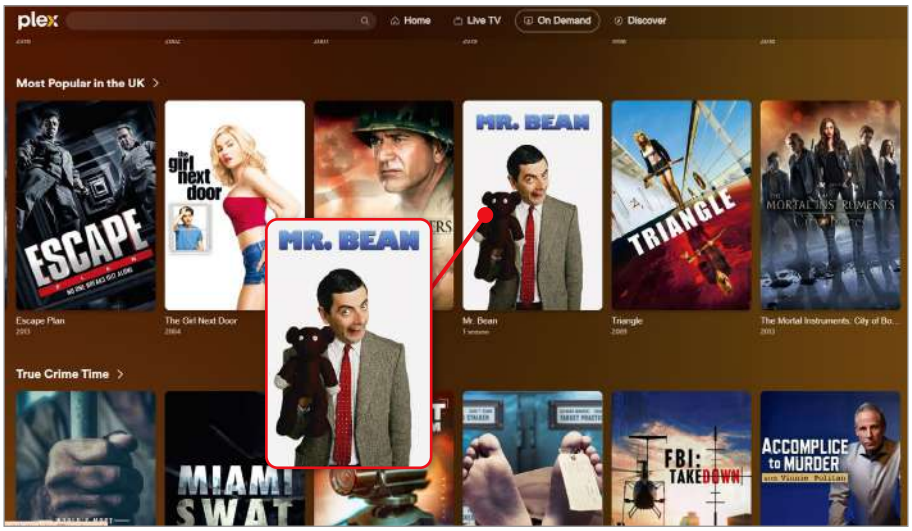
We also like the new Pluto Retro Toons channel, where you can watch classic animated series such as *Danger Mouse* and *Popeye*.

Plex

www.snipca.com/56162

Plex has over 600 FAST channels in the UK and is constantly expanding its line-up. Last summer, it added 92 new channels, including FIFA+ and NFL for sports fans, History Hunters for history buffs and Inside Crime for true-crime addicts.

It's also worth browsing Plex's frequently updated library of free-to-watch films in its On Demand section. These currently include Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991), Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* (1982) and the *Mr Bean* movie (1997 – see screenshot below left).



Plex frequently adds free, well-known films like *Mr Bean* to its On Demand section

Rakuten TV

www.snipca.com/56168

Like Pluto TV and Plex, Rakuten TV offers a mix of free 'live' TV channels and on-demand TV shows and films, as well as a store where you can buy or rent the latest blockbuster movies. It recently made 50 of its FAST channels available without its app on TCL smart TVs, through the TCL Channel feature.

In April, Virgin TV added two Rakuten TV channels to its FAST service: Rakuten TV Top Movies (channel 446, see screenshot below) and Rakuten TV Action (447). You can also now access the Rakuten TV app on Virgin Media TV 360 and Stream devices.

Free Rakuten channels such as Top Movies are now available on TCL TVs and Virgin TV

Watch live TV on your streaming stick

One advantage smart TVs have over streaming sticks is that you can quickly switch between on-demand TV apps and live Freeview channels. Freely (www.freely.co.uk) makes this even easier, but if you're not ready to buy a new Freely TV, there's a much cheaper solution.

Last October, Google added a Channels section to its 'Chromecast with Google TV' and new Google TV Streamer. This lets you access live TV channels directly from your home screen, including BBC One to Four, ITV 1 to 4, and STV (but not Channel 4 or 5).

Simply select a channel to launch the relevant broadcaster's app (this must already be installed) and watch it live. You don't need a TV aerial because the feature streams the live channels over the internet.

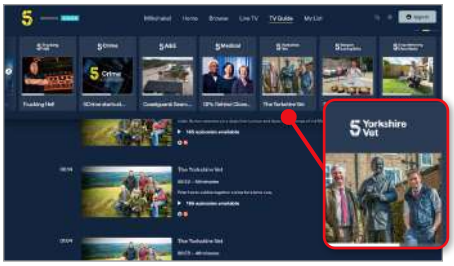
In March, Amazon followed suit by adding a Live tab to its Fire TV sticks (see screenshot). This similarly provides instant access to live channels from the BBC, ITV, and Channel 4 and 5, without you having to open their apps first.

5

www.snipca.com/56170

In March, Channel 5 and its My5 streaming service were rebranded under the name 5 and the latter was relaunched with lots of new TV shows to enjoy. 5 now offers 15 FAST channels in addition to those you can watch on Freeview such as 5Action and 5Star.

These include 5Cops, which streams police-themed shows such as *Traffic Cops*; 5Medical (*GPs: Behind Closed Doors* and the like); and channels devoted to popular 5 shows such as *The Yorkshire Vet* (see screenshot below left) and *Bargain-Loving Brits*. 5 has also expanded its on-demand content to feature TV series and films from partners including AMC, CBS and MTV.

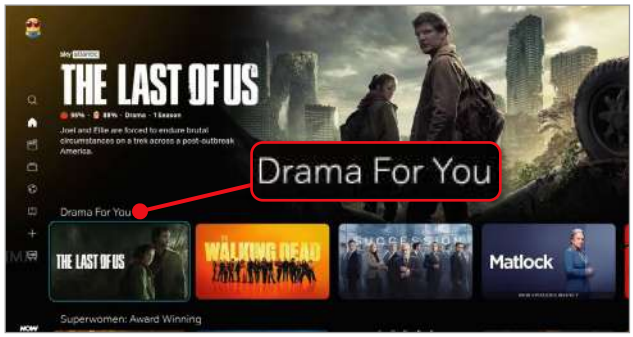


The relaunched 5 has FAST channels devoted to popular shows like *The Yorkshire Vet*

Now

www.snipca.com/56176

The Sky-owned streaming service Now was revamped earlier this year with a less cluttered home screen, a main menu on the left instead of across the top and an improved search tool. These tweaks make it easier to navigate the app and find something new to watch, and are complemented by better organisation of Now's content.



Now has redesigned its TV app to make it easier to find new shows to watch

Similar to Netflix, the updated service provides a list of its Top 10 most popular TV shows and movies, and groups series into categories such as Unmissable Documentaries, Live & Upcoming Sport and Drama For You (see screenshot above). You can also now create separate profiles for each member of your household.

Netflix has also redesigned its home screen with a "clean and modern" look and personalised recommendations as you browse. However, many viewers don't like it and have even created a petition to get the old interface restored: www.snipca.com/56177.

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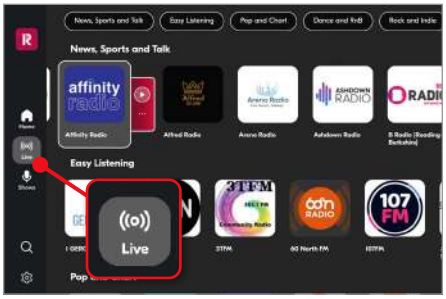
BEST NEW TV APPS FOR HOBBIES & INTERESTS

Radioplayer

www.snipca.com/56192

Listen to hundreds of radio stations through your TV using this free app, which is now available for most streaming devices (except Roku) following its arrival on Fire TV last year. Select your country and location to tune into local stations, or browse Radioplayer's recommended stations and shows.

Alternatively, search for stations by genre, such as 'News, Sports and Talk'; 'Classical and World'; and 'Pop and Chart'; or by decade – from 1950s to 2020s. Alternatvely, just choose Live (see screenshot below) to discover which stations are broadcasting now.



Radioplayer lets you tune into hundreds of UK stations through your TV

Although, like other radio-streaming services in the UK, licensing restrictions prevent Radioplayer from including overseas stations, you can unlock more by changing your default country in the app's settings. You don't need to sign up for an account, and there are no ads other than the stations' own.

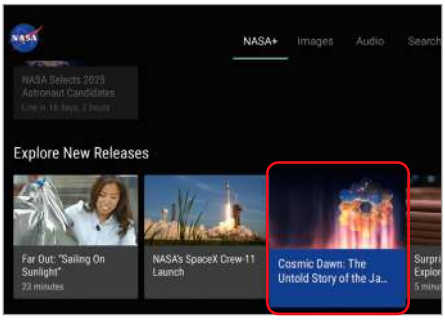
Sync the Radioplayer TV app with its app for Android and iOS to keep listening to your favourite shows wherever you are.

NASA+

www.snipca.com/56180

The NASA+ streaming service offers live coverage of events such as rocket launches, and space-related programmes you can watch on-demand. In March, it was added to Prime Video as a FAST channel and in August it landed on Netflix.

However, the best way to access NASA+ is through NASA's own TV app, where it's free to view with no adverts. Interesting new content includes the announcement of NASA's 2025 astronauts, footage of the SpaceX Crew-11 launch and *Cosmic*



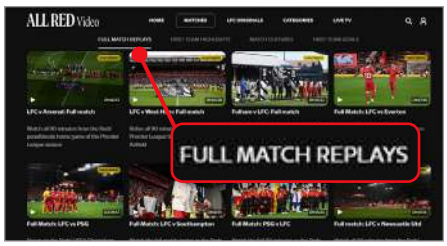
NASA+ offers live coverage of events and space-related programmes

Dawn: the Untold Story of the James Webb Telescope (see screenshot above). You can also browse NASA+ programmes by topic, such as Solar System, Universe and 'Humans in Space', and watch ongoing series including *Far Out*. This provides an astronaut's perspective on living in the International Space Station.

All Red Video

www.snipca.com/56185

Formerly called LFCTV Go, Liverpool FC's official TV app launched last October but was rebranded All Red Video in time for the new Premier League season. It offers full match replays (see screenshot below) and edited highlights, as well as LFC Women, Under-21 and Under-18 games.



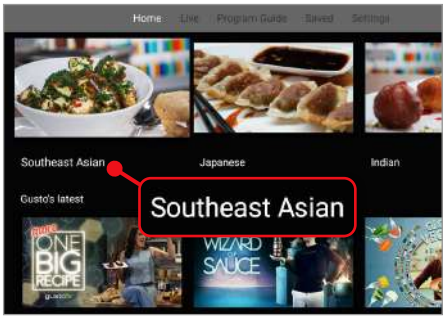
All Red Video offers full replays and edited highlights of Liverpool games

You can stream some (less important) matches live and watch behind-the-scenes training videos, player and manager interviews, and special moments from the archive. All Red Video costs £4.99 a month, but you get your first month for free.

Gusto TV

www.snipca.com/56193

Gusto TV proudly describes itself as the "world's best food channel". It serves a tasty variety of cooking shows you can watch live and on-demand, and video



Gusto TV is a FAST channel and TV app for cooking ideas and recipes

recipes for cuisines including Southeast Asian (see screenshot above), Latin American and Italian.

Gusto TV was originally a FAST channel, and remains so on LG Channels, Plex and Pluto TV, but last year became a fully fledged TV app. This lets you browse its schedule for the next two weeks and save your favourite shows.

Programmes include *One World Kitchen* (international dishes), *Fish the Dish* (seafood) and *The Wizard of Sauce* (sauces). You need to register for a free account to use the app.

Lamborghini TV

www.snipca.com/56188

Most of us can only dream of owning a Lamborghini so the company has launched a TV app that indulges our aspirations. Explore the latest models, watch videos of them in action, explore their sleek designs in 3D and learn about the technology behind the cars.

Although some of the content feels like an extended Lamborghini advert, there are some interesting interviews (such as with photographer Anton Corbijn), footage of motorsport events and videos of luxury cars (see screenshot below) speeding across dramatic landscapes.

Lamborghini TV showcases its luxury cars, such as the Temerario, in a suitably classy manner

BEST NEW TV APPS FOR PHOTOS, VPNs AND MORE

PixFolio

www.snipca.com/56200

Most streaming sticks and some smart TVs can display a slideshow of your photos while your screen is idle. They either use pictures stored locally on your TV or sync with services such as Google Photos and Amazon Photos, but don't offer much scope for configuration.

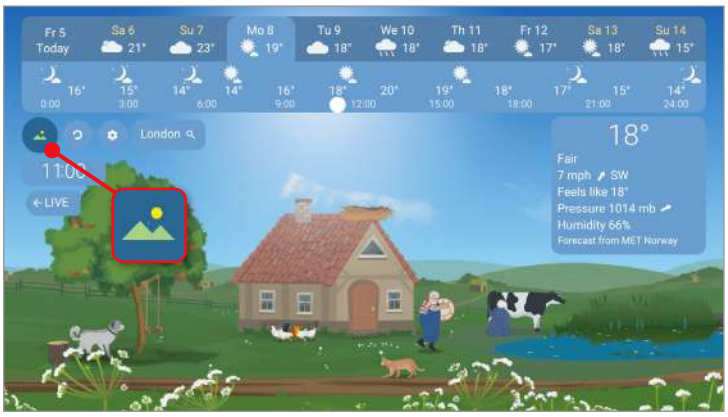
For more flexibility, PixFolio creates a custom slideshow from pictures in your Google Photos account and photos stored on your TV, streaming stick or USB stick. Its Apple TV app can also source photos from iCloud, OneDrive and Flickr.

PixFolio lets you choose how long photos in your slideshow are displayed for, which transition to use between them – such as fade, slide, flip or zoom on face – and whether to include a clock, weather and basic image information (see screenshot below). You can move through pictures by pressing the left and right buttons on your TV remote.

The app was recently updated to beat a restriction implemented by Google earlier this year, which blocks third-party tools from accessing an entire Google Photos library. PixFolio's workaround is to let you import up to 2,000 pictures when you set it up. This involves granting access to your Google Photos account, either entering a code or scanning a QR code, then choosing the photos you want to include in your slideshow,

PixFolio costs £3.99 a month – or a one-off fee of £14.99 – after a three-day free trial (you don't have to enter payment-card details for this).

PixFolio displays a slideshow of your photos on your TV screen – with optional clock



YoWindow Weather displays the forecast as an animated landscape

YoWindow Weather

www.snipca.com/56201

This brilliant free TV app presents the weather visually in the form of an animated country scene (complete with ambient sounds) that depicts the current conditions. When you choose a different time or day in the 10-day forecast, the picture changes accordingly.

YoWindow Weather's forecasts include the outlook for the day, actual and 'feels-like' temperatures, wind speed, humidity and pressure. It detects your location automatically but you can also search for the forecast elsewhere (MET Norway provides the data) .

Select the mountain icon on the left (see screenshot above) to change the 'living landscape' image to dozens of alternate scenes, including sea, nature and wonders of the world. The latest update adds a new Village option (pictured), which features a farmer collecting mushrooms while his wife milks a cow and various animals scamper around.

You can set YoWindow Weather as your TV's screensaver by going into its Settings and enabling that option.

Philips Hue Sync TV

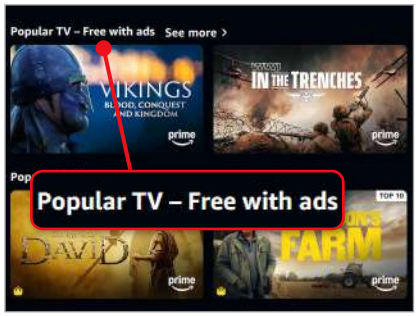
www.snipca.com/56197

If you have a Philips Hue smart-lighting system and a new Samsung or LG smart TV, you can now sync the two using the Philips Hue Sync TV app. Newly available

Five TV apps you can no longer use

Freevee

Amazon's free, ad-supported streaming service shut down on 3 September. TV shows previously available on Freevee can now be found in the 'Free with ads' sections of Prime Video (see screenshot).



X TV

X TV launched in beta last September, allowing you to watch videos from the social network formerly known as Twitter on your TV. The app no longer works and directs you to the X mobile app instead.

Vevo

The Vevo app was removed from Sky and Virgin Media TV boxes in January, and is no longer available on other TV platforms. You can still watch Vevo FAST channels on Samsung TV Plus and Rakuten.

YouTube Kids

Last summer, Google shut down the YouTube Kids app for smart TVs and streaming sticks. It still has a mobile app, and young viewers can access its content on a TV through the main YouTube app.

BBC iPlayer

In July, Virgin Media ended support for the BBC iPlayer app on its TiVo set-top boxes. It has offered affected customers a free upgrade to its TV360 box, which includes iPlayer and many other TV apps.

Philips Hue Sync TV matches your lights to what's happening on screen

for LG sets running webOS 24 or later (2024 models onwards – Samsung TVs must be from 2022 onwards), this syncs your Philips Hue lights to reflect whatever's happening on-screen. For example, if a scene shows a vivid sunrise or sunset, your lights change colour to match (pictured above). If there's a loud explosion, they flash brightly. You can customise the intensity of the effect.

The Philips Hue Sync TV app costs £2.69 a month or a one-off fee of £114.99.

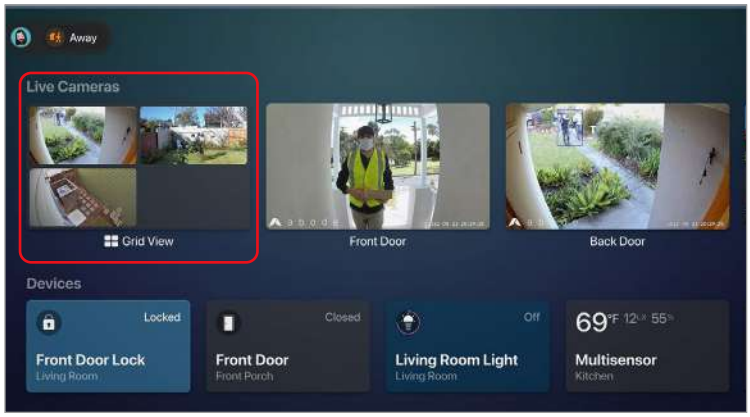
Abode

www.snipca.com/56199

Home-security company Abode recently launched an app for Apple TV, allowing you to monitor your security cameras on the biggest screen in your home. The app displays the status of connected devices, streams live feeds from up to four cameras (see screenshot below) and lets you view recorded clips.

If you have an Abode Standard or Pro plan, you can review 24/7 footage stored online from the last seven days, and jump to specific events. Abode has also updated its app for Android/Google TV with an improved menu layout.

Rival home-security company Alarm.com also has apps for Apple TV and Android/Google TV, as well as Fire TV devices (www.snipca.com/56198). This similarly streams video feeds from up to four cameras.



Monitor your Abode security cameras on your TV using its new app

Proton VPN

www.snipca.com/56203

In our 'Unlock websites with a VPN' Cover Feature in Issue 717 (get it from www.snipca.com/56202), we recommended Proton VPN as the best free VPN for PCs and mobile devices. It's also our top choice for smart TVs and streaming sticks, though – like other VPNs – it's not available on LG, Samsung or Roku devices.

ProtonVPN's free servers can unblock restricted content on your TV

Once you've signed into your free Proton account, the app is very easy to use. Select the Recommended location next to 'Quick connect' (see screenshot above), then allow Proton to set up a VPN connection (you only need to do this the first time) and you'll be instantly connected to a server.

This disguises your IP address and encrypts your data, so you can use TV services without being tracked and unlock geo-restricted content. Proton VPN's free servers are located in the US, Netherlands, Japan, Poland, Romania and – as of August – Singapore.

Proton is planning to add more features to the Android/Google TV app very soon. These will "give you more control over how you watch your favourite content on your big-screen TV" (see www.snipca.com/56204). ca

Best new Freeview channels

Freeview may eventually be replaced by Freely once the latter is available on more TVs and streaming devices (see page 8). But in the meantime it's continuing to expand its channel line-up.

The latest additions include That's Oldies (channel 75), which shows old music videos; Hobbycraft TV (97) for hobby and crafting advice; and ITV Quiz (28) for game shows. Additionally, the 'Great! Christmas' channel (see screenshot) has returned to Freeview (52), screening festive films from now until 6 January.

If you can't see these new channels, try retuning your Freeview TV or box. See www.snipca.com/56206 for instructions.

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WHY YOU NEED AN MP3 PLAYER

Streaming music on your phone is convenient, but MP3 players have bigger benefits. **Robert Irvine** explains why you should buy one and recommends the best devices

Digital audio players – or MP3 players as they're more commonly called – have recently made a comeback. As with DVDs (see our feature in Issue 718, page 60), many people have found that older methods of playing music and video have advantages over the restrictions and unreliability of streaming. This is especially true if you've amassed a large collection of MP3s by ripping tracks from CDs and downloading songs from the internet.

In this feature, we suggest why you should listen to music and podcasts on a dedicated portable player rather than your smartphone. We also recommend the best devices to buy for under £200.

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY AN MP3 PLAYER

Interruption-free listening

When you listen to music on your smartphone, you're likely to be interrupted and distracted by incoming calls, messages and app notifications. Your streaming may also be halted by a lost mobile or Wi-Fi signal.

An MP3 player offers distraction-free listening and works offline, so you're not dependent on a network connection. Additionally, because there are fewer processes running in the background, its battery lasts longer than a smartphone's.

More storage for music

Although smartphones include enough storage for MP3s, your audio files have to share that space with your apps, photos, videos and downloads. If you have a large music collection, you'll quickly run out of room.

Android-based MP3 players – like the Innioasis G3 – support music-streaming services

MP3 players dedicate almost their entire capacities to music files and you can usually expand their storage with an SD card. You don't need to install a media-player app to listen to music, though Android-based devices – such as the Innioasis G3 (pictured above) – support streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music.

Higher-quality sound

Whereas smartphones are jacks-of-all-trades, MP3 players are purpose-built for listening to music and offer higher-quality audio. They have better digital-to-analogue converters (DACs) and stronger amplifiers to deliver superior sound through headphones.

Many MP3 players support lossless formats such as FLAC and WAV, and higher bitrates and sample rates than smartphones. Sound quality depends on how files are encoded, but audiophiles will appreciate the difference.

Cheaper, sturdier and safer

Smartphones are notoriously fragile and it's easy to break the screen while listening to music on the go. MP3 players have sturdier builds and are cheaper to replace when broken, lost or stolen – plus they don't store your personal data.

MP3 players are generally smaller than smartphones, and most have physical buttons for playing, pausing and skipping music. This means you can control them without touching a screen or removing them from your pocket.

Headphone sockets

Apple removed the 3.5mm headphone jack from iPhones in 2016, and most Android-phone manufacturers have followed suit since. That's fine if you use wireless earbuds such as AirPods, or buy a USB-C-to-3.5mm-jack adapter, but not if you prefer the comfort and quality of traditional headphones. All portable MP3 players have a 3.5mm headphone socket, so you can use your favourite 'phones'. Newer devices also offer Bluetooth connectivity.

Turn your phone into an iPod

If you can't afford an MP3 player, the free app ClassiPod (www.snipca.com/55297) turns your Android phone into an iPod Classic. This lets you browse and listen to music like you're using Apple's iconic device, replicating its basic interface and click wheel (see screenshot).

ClassiPod scans folders on your device to add tracks to your library, organises them by artist, album and genre, and displays cover art where available. It has no ads or in-app purchases.

For iOS, there's the similar RetroPod (www.snipca.com/56239), which makes your iPhone look like an iPod. However, it only plays music from your Spotify or Apple Music library, not audio files saved on your device.

WHICH MP3 PLAYER SHOULD YOU BUY?

Best for value

Majority MP3 Go

£30 from www.snipca.com/56225

This tiny MP3 player measures just 66x42x19mm and weighs only 33g, but packs in a great set of features and provides brilliant value for money. It offers 16GB of storage, enough for around 4,000 songs, which is expandable by 128GB with a microSD card, giving you the space to store up to 36,000.

You can organise tracks into folders and playlists directly on the device, and easily operate it using its physical buttons (its 1.9in screen is non-touch).

Attach the Majority MP3 Go to your clothes or bag with this clip

In addition to a 3.5mm jack, the player features Bluetooth for connecting to wireless headphones or a portable speaker (standard earphones are supplied).

Battery life is an incredible 34 hours and you can use the device's 'sports clip' (pictured above) to attach it to your clothes or bag. The Majority MP3 Go supports FLAC and WAV formats, as well as MP3, and also includes a stopwatch and voice recorder.

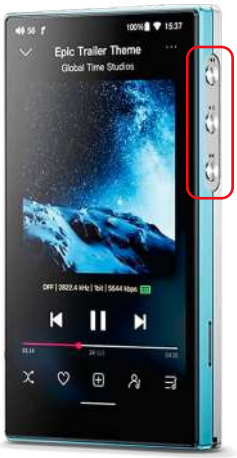
Best for sound quality

FiiO JM21

£180 from www.snipca.com/56224

When we reviewed the FiiO JM21 in Issue 706 (page 26), we gave it a five-star 'Buy it!' award, so impressed were we with its build and sound quality. It's sturdily constructed from plastic and aluminium, and features a relatively large (4.7in) screen, with a sharp (750x1334-pixel) resolution.

Its specifications are more like a smartphone's, with an eight-core processor, 3GB of RAM and an adapted version of Android 13. But it's clearly designed for music, with two headphone sockets (3.5mm and 4.4mm), Bluetooth 5.0 for listening wirelessly and three 'gain' settings for optimising its volume.



The FiiO JM21 is sturdily designed and delivers superb sound

The FiiO JM21 delivers clear, vibrant sound with deep and textured bass frequencies. Its 22GB of storage can be expanded to 2TB with a microSD card, and it has physical as well as on-screen controls (see picture above). Its battery life is 12.5 hours, which is enough for a day's listening.

Best for versatility

Avantree SP850

£28 from www.snipca.com/55752

Recommended by reader Hugh Rogers (see Issue 717, page 41), the Avantree SP850 is three audio devices in one. It combines an MP3 player with a Bluetooth speaker and an FM radio, so you'll never be short of something to listen to, with a battery life of around 10 hours.

To play MP3s, switch the Avantree SP850 to SD Card mode and insert a microSD card containing audio files in the slot on the bottom. It supports MP3, WMA and WAV files.

The play/pause, fast-forward and rewind buttons are conveniently located on the front of the device, with a classic on/off/volume knob on the side (pictured above) and radio-station presets across the top. It has a 3.5mm headphone socket, but to use Bluetooth earbuds you'll need the Avantree Soundbyte T (£37 from www.snipca.com/56235).

The Avantree SP850 combines an MP3 player, speaker and radio

TRANSFER AUDIO FILES TO YOUR PLAYER

You no longer need to use bloated software such as iTunes to transfer music you've ripped from CDs or downloaded from the web to your MP3 player. Today's devices show up as removable drives in File Explorer when you connect them with a USB cable, so you can simply drag and drop audio files from your computer. If you're copying to an SD card, you'll need to format it first.

This simplicity means you can also listen to podcasts on your MP3 player, by downloading them to your PC then transferring them via USB. For example, to download podcasts of BBC radio shows, find a programme on the BBC Sounds website (www.bbc.co.uk/sounds), click the Programme Website button (if available) and click Download (see screenshot below).

Download BBC podcasts to copy and listen to on your MP3 player

Audiobooks from services such as Audible can't usually be transferred to MP3 players because they're protected by DRM and can only be played on the device they were bought on. There are exceptions, such as copyright-free audiobooks from LibriVox (www.librivox.org).

On Android-based digital audio players, such as the FiiO JM21 (see left), Innioasis G3 (see opposite page) and Sony NW-A306 (£349 from www.snipca.com/56236), you can install the Audible app to download audiobooks. ca

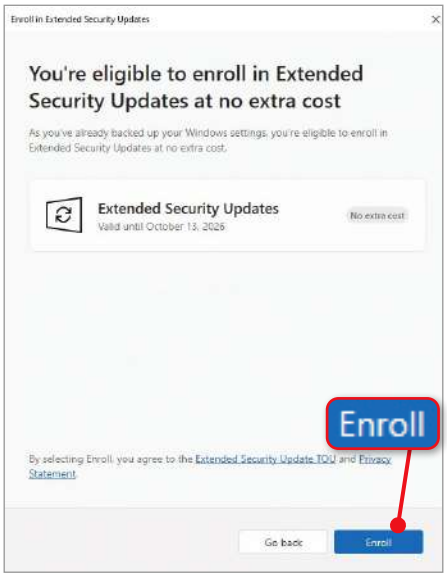
HOW WE'LL KEEP USING WINDOWS 10

We love Windows 11, but there are plenty of reasons why we also want to keep running its predecessor. Three ***Computeractive*** writers explain how they'll do so, while one Linux convert jumps ship!

JONATHAN PARKYN

Why I've chosen free support by syncing with OneDrive

My ageing Windows 10 laptop has something modern machines rarely offer: a built-in DVD drive. I have loads of films and home movies on DVD and I don't want to lose the ability to play these or rip them to a hard drive at some point. The drive also works as a DVD burner, so I can create my own discs. This is something I do less these days, admittedly, but I'd hate to lose the option when needed.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You're eligible to enroll in Extended Security Updates at no extra cost
As you've already backed up your Windows settings, you're eligible to enroll in Extended Security Updates at no extra cost.
Extended Security Updates
Valid until October 13, 2026
No extra cost
Enroll
By selecting Enroll, you agree to the Extended Security Update TOU and Privacy Statement.
Go back
Enroll

Jonathan has enrolled in Microsoft's free extended support scheme by backing up to OneDrive

I realise I could just buy an external DVD drive and plug it into a shiny new Windows 11 laptop, but I don't like to spend money where I don't have to – and I love the neatness of having the DVD function built into the computer itself, rather than dangling from a USB port. Plus, because it's a laptop I can always take it with me and play DVDs when I'm away from home – on holiday or at my parent's house, for example.

That's why I want to keep running Windows 10. And the route I've chosen is to enroll the laptop into Microsoft's free Extended Security Updates (www.snipca.com/55995, see screenshot left) by agreeing to back up and sync my files to OneDrive.

Part of my reason for keeping the laptop running is to keep costs down, which is why I'm prepared to accept Microsoft's requirement to sync to OneDrive. The alternative would be paying around £30 for its extended updates – and I shouldn't have to do that simply to keep using a computer I already own.

I've opted to back up the bare minimum – just my Windows settings and preferences, which take up barely any storage – so that I don't need to pay for more OneDrive capacity.

There's an element of kicking the can down the road with this approach. I know I'll need to take further action between now and 13 October 2026, but at least this gives me breathing space before I have to decide on a permanent solution.

ROBERT IRVINE

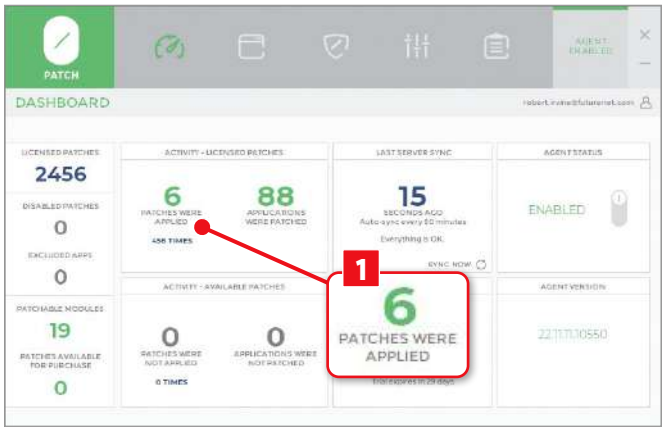
Why I'll pay for security patches

My seven-year-old Windows 10 laptop doesn't meet Windows 11's system requirements, so I couldn't upgrade it even if I wanted to – unless I use a workaround such as Flyoobe (www.snipca.com/56031). Besides, I already have a Windows 11 laptop and if I end up with two, I'll sorely miss Windows 10's classic Start menu and full context (right-click) menus.

To prolong my old laptop's life, I enrolled for Extended Security Updates as soon as the 'Enroll now' link appeared in Windows Update. But it isn't a long-term solution, and I don't want to spend the next year fretting about what to do next.

I've therefore decided to 'future-proof' my Windows 10 laptop by getting security updates from 0patch (www.snipca.com/56000). Its 'long live Windows 10!' message sticks two fingers up to Microsoft's finger-wagging, and it will keep my laptop protected until at least 2030. By then, I'll probably be ready to upgrade to Windows 12.

As we explained in our 'Windows 10 survival guide' (Issue 718, page 53), 0patch issues 'micropatches' for security vulnerabilities that could be exploited by hackers once Windows 10 support ends. These are automatically applied to processes in your PC's memory, and 0patch says you "won't even notice" they've been installed. I'm reassured by the fact



0patch will keep Robert's Windows 10 laptop safe until 2030 by applying security 'micropatches'

that 0patch has patched Windows computers for years – it's not a snake-oil company that's sprung up to cash in.

After signing up for a 0patch account, I noticed it's offering a free trial of its Pro plan, which includes the required patches for Windows 10. This usually costs €24.95 ex VAT (about £26 inc VAT), but you can try it for 30 days without entering payment-card details. I opted into the trial, downloaded the 0patch Agent tool and saw that six patches were automatically applied (see screenshot above).

Before the ESU scheme ends in October 2026, I'll pay for a permanent 0patch Pro licence to get patches for the next year. I can then renew it the following year and the year after that, without Microsoft breathing down my neck.

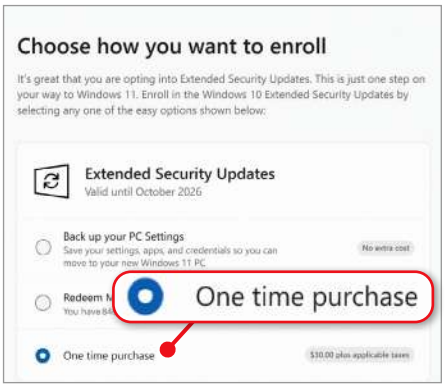
DANIEL BOOTH

Why I'm paying for Microsoft's extended security updates

I always thought Microsoft would buckle under pressure and offer free extended support, but forcing users to sync their files to OneDrive is breathtakingly cynical. I stopped using OneDrive years ago, and there's no way I'm going back just to get free security updates. It simply failed too many times for reasons I gave up trying to fathom.

I switched to Dropbox first, then the privacy-focused pCloud (www.snipca.com/55691), which gives you 10GB for free if you carry out certain tasks like verifying your email address.

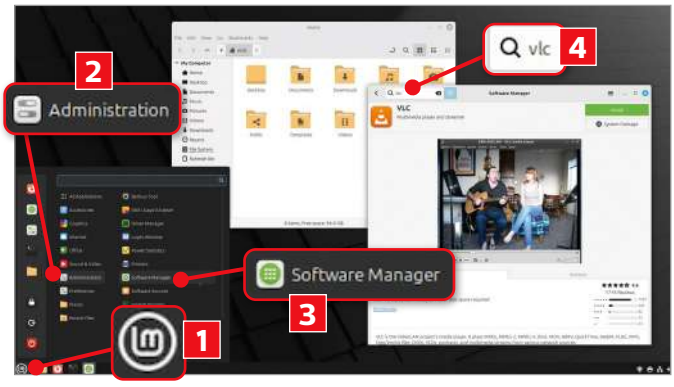
But I still have two Windows 10 machines (a desktop PC and laptop) that aren't ready for the scrapheap. Neither can be upgraded to Windows 11, so I'm going to run my laptop offline and pay $30 (about £25) to keep updating my PC. I don't like paying for this, but what I resent more is Microsoft trying to strong-arm me into returning to OneDrive.


Choose how you want to enroll
It's great that you are opting into Extended Security Updates. This is just one step on your way to Windows 11. Enroll in the Windows 10 Extended Security Updates by selecting any one of the easy options shown below:
Extended Security Updates
Valid until October 2026
Back up your PC Settings
Save your settings, apps, and credentials so you can move to your new Windows 11 PC
No extra cost
One time purchase
One time purchase
$10.00 plus applicable taxes

Daniel has grudgingly chosen to pay for Microsoft's extended security updates

It's easy to do. Press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click Windows Update and 'Enroll now'. Now select 'One time purchase' (see screenshot above) and sign into your Microsoft account. This takes you to a payment page, and after paying you'll receive confirmation in Windows Update.

Microsoft is only offering these updates for one year, so I'll need another solution in October 2026. But I just wonder if it'll have no choice but to offer them beyond that. After all, despite the end of support looming, Windows 10's market share actually *grew* in August (www.snipca.com/56275) – to 45 per cent. If that stays at about 40 per cent over the next 12 months, I predict another Microsoft U-turn.



Nick loves how easy it is to install programs on Linux Mint – start by clicking the LM button

NICK PEERS

Why I'm switching to Linux

I wish my colleagues well aboard HMS Windows 10 as it continues its voyage, but I'm jumping ship. For years I used a dedicated Windows 10 desktop PC for certain tasks: watching videos, editing images and researching my family tree. It performs those tasks admirably and there's plenty of processing power and RAM to meet my needs for years to come.

There's no way I'm buying a new PC just to appease Microsoft, so I've decided to switch to Linux. The great thing about switching is that it's a permanent solution – I'm not relying on temporary extended updates. Linux runs beautifully on older systems and my PC will be supported for years if not decades to come.

Switching is easy. I copied my user folders (Documents, Photos, Videos and so on) to an external hard drive, then downloaded the Linux Mint installer (www.linuxmint.com), which makes it simple to install Mint in place of Windows 10. Its Cinnamon Edition desktop (www.snipca.com/56274) is very similar to Windows, so is immediately familiar to use and navigate. The same is true for its File Explorer equivalent (called Files on the desktop – or officially Nemo), which makes it easy to copy my files back from the USB hard drive to my new user account's personal folders.

Mint is loaded with numerous apps, including Pix (photo manager) and Celluloid (video player). They're both decent, but I want to keep using the software I like on Windows, such as VLC Media Player (www.videolan.org), which plays bought DVDs as well as my own home movies. Installing it is a simple affair: click the bottom-left LM button (1 in our screenshot below), then choose Administration 2 followed by Software Manager 3 and search for vlc 4.

Other apps can be installed from the same place – there's OpenShot (www.openshot.org) and GIMP (www.gimp.org) for editing videos and photos. For genealogy, I'll use the excellent (and free) Gramps (www.snipca.com/56276). ca

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Why does my laptop shut down when I'm gaming?

Q I have a Dell laptop that sometimes suddenly says 'low battery' and then immediately shuts down, literally seconds after the message appears. However, this happens even when it's plugged into the mains and showing 100-per-cent charge. This doesn't happen when I'm browsing the web or working in Windows, but often when I'm playing games. But because I play games quite a lot, it's frustrating. If I leave the machine off for a few minutes and then power it back up, everything is fine – until the next time. Could it be overheating?

Al Mason

1 **Use the My Dell app to tweak how your laptop manages its power**

A Computers, and particularly laptops, can certainly overheat when either or both the processor (CPU) and GPU are running at full pelt. If this happens, they might shut themselves down as an act of self-preservation – and yes, this typically happens when playing games. However, that's not what's going on here.

In fact, what you're experiencing is a surprisingly common quirk with laptops tasked with gaming, especially those in the lower to mid-range price bracket. During demanding sessions, the CPU and GPU can draw more power than the charger alone can provide – particularly if the manufacturer has included a lower-wattage power adapter to cut costs (which, believe us, they do). To work around this, some laptops use a hybrid power design, which supplements mains power by drawing from the battery during heavy use.

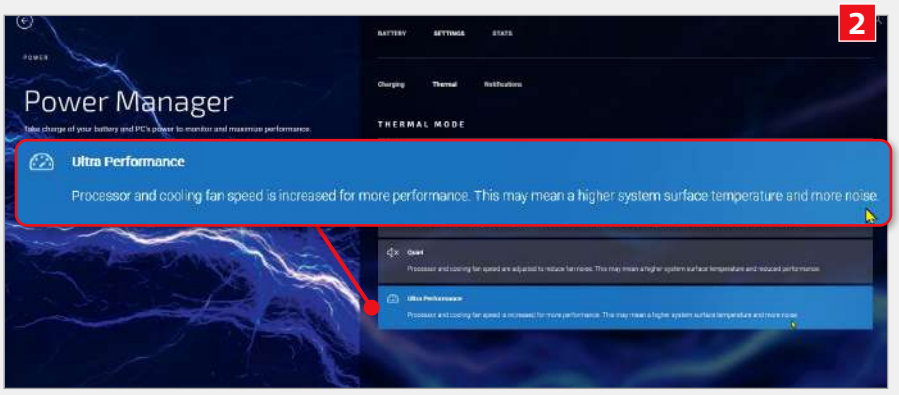
However, if the hardware is pushed for too long like this, the battery can fully drain – and that's when you'll see the sudden warning about 'low power', followed by a rapid shutdown. The problem can be exacerbated by an older, degraded battery.

There are a few strategies to prevent it from happening. First, try using the My Dell app to tweak the way your laptop manages its power. This should be pre-installed on your laptop but, if you've previously removed it, it's a free download from www.snipca.com/55897 (see screenshot 1).

Launch the app then click Power. Next, in the right-hand pane, click the Thermal tab and, below that, click Ultra Performance 2. Then select the Charging tab. Here, you might need to experiment to see which mode minimises the problem, based on the particular way you use the laptop – but Adaptive or Always AC are likely to be the most effective options.

Finally, you can use a hidden Microsoft tool to check your battery's health: this might help you to understand what's going on if or when the laptop next shuts down. Press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu then choose 'Terminal (Admin)' or 'Windows PowerShell (Admin)'. Now type powercfg /batteryreport and press Enter.

Wait a few moments then open the 'battery-report.html' file, which you'll find in **C:\Windows\system32**. If the battery's current charge capacity is much less than the listed design capacity, then it could indicate the battery is nearing the end of its life.


Power Manager
THERMAL MODE
Ultra Performance
Processor and cooling fan speed is increased for more performance. This may mean a higher system surface temperature and more noise.

2

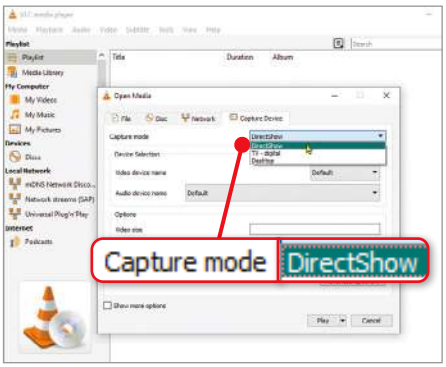
In the My Dell app click the Thermal tab, then select Ultra Performance to speed up your processor

Why doesn't my laptop recognise my camcorder?

Q After many years stashed away, I decided to make use of my old JVC GR-DVL9700 digital video camera. The problem is that my Asus Zenbook, running Windows 11 Pro, doesn't recognise it. Is there any way to solve my problem?

Ray Mason

Connect your camera's RCA or S-video outputs to a USB video-capture device like this



In VLC Media Player set the 'Capture mode' to DirectShow

A The nub of the problem is that your camcorder uses FireWire (also known as IEEE 1394 or i.Link on Sony devices). This is effectively an obsolete connection standard. Cheap FireWire-to-USB cables can be found online but they have a very specific, niche usage – and are useless for capturing video digitally. Plenty of people buy them unwittingly, and we suspect that's how you've tried to connect.

So, if you were hoping to use your GR-DVL9700 as a live digital webcam or similar, you can pretty much forget that idea. However, if you have old (or indeed new) recordings on digital-video (DV) tape that you'd like to transfer, this is possible. The best-quality transfers would come from connecting via FireWire, but modern laptops like yours simply don't support this.

The only practical alternative is to use your GR-DVL9700's analogue composite (RCA) or S-video outputs, either of which can be connected to a USB video-capture device – like the Digitnow model pictured above (£10 from www.snipca.com/55893). Next, connect your camcorder via a 3.5mm jack-to-RCA cable (around £4 from www.snipca.com/55894). Then, use a video-capture program on your PC to record the camcorder as you play back a tape.

The popular VLC Media Player, a free download from www.videolan.org, can also capture video. Choose 'Open Capture Device' in the Media menu, then choose the Capture Device tab.

While there are numerous options to explore, the fundamental process is to select DirectShow as the 'Capture mode' (see screenshot above) and then, next to 'Video device name', choose your USB video-capture device. Then, at the bottom, click the arrow next to the Play button and instead choose Convert. Now, click the Browse button, then choose a location and name for the resulting MP4 video file. Finally, press Play on your camcorder then click the Start button in VLC.

Can I add an NPU to my PC?

Q When certain operating systems or AI programs require a neural processing unit (NPU) to be installed in a PC with a certain number of TOPS, would it be technically possible for third-party manufacturers to supply users with NPU units that could be connected to PCs – perhaps via an OCuLink port or similar high-speed interface? And if so, could computer manufacturers block the use of such an add-on?

Peter Jenkins

Lenovo's AI Stick external NPU is only at the concept stage for now

A This is an interesting question, and there are a couple of possible answers. The first answer is that, technically, yes, it is possible. Consumer PCs typically don't feature OCuLink connectivity, because that port is intended for servers and data centres. However, some companies are experimenting with external NPUs that connect via Thunderbolt or USB-C, such as Lenovo's AI Stick (www.snipca.com/56126, pictured above). It's just a concept for now, revealed earlier this year, but if released then adding an NPU could be as simple as attaching a cable. We doubt PC manufacturers would block their use, but an external NPU might not be compatible with some apps, services or hardware.

And that brings us to another important factor, which is market forces. Few users actually need (or even want) an NPU. Over time, new PCs will increasingly have this technology built in. Factor in the aforementioned compatibility challenges, and we doubt there'll be a big market for add-on NPUs.

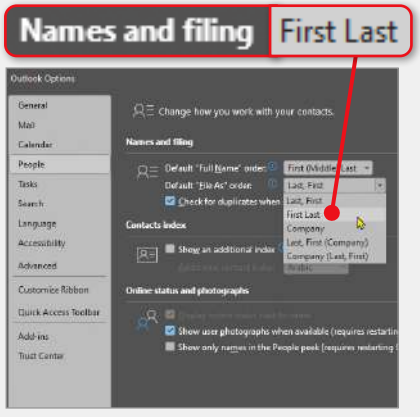
Why are my Outlook contacts back to front?

Q When adding a new contact in Outlook 365 I type, for example, John Perkins. However, when I open that contact, it's then shown as 'Perkins, John'. This has only happened recently. Must I now waste my time wading through my hundreds of contacts to change them to how I want them? Is my Outlook faulty or has Microsoft changed them deliberately?

John Perkins

A Outlook 365 is a victim of the modern scourge of continuous development, meaning that apps can and often do change day by day. So, while we can't say for certain that this is Microsoft's doing, it's certainly possible that some recent update has tweaked the default setting in your system that controls this behaviour. Fortunately, it's pretty easy to fix – when you know where to look.

First, open Outlook's File menu, then choose Options. Next, on the left, click to choose the People tab. Now, in the right-hand pane, under the 'Names and filing' heading, you'll see that the 'Default "File As" order' option is currently set to 'Last, First'. Click to open the dropdown menu, choose 'First Last' (or whatever option you want – see screenshot below) and then click OK to apply.



In Outlook's settings, change the 'Default "File As" order' option to 'First Last'

Can I rescue photos and documents from my dead laptop?

Q When I try to boot my Asus N-series laptop it can no longer progress past its setup utility. I've tried various tricks to restart it, but none work. Before it died, I'd noticed my SSD was getting full. There's a second drive on there that contains my data. This laptop was on its last legs anyway and couldn't be upgraded to Windows 11, but I'd like to be able to rescue a few photos and documents from it. Any ideas?

Sue Gray

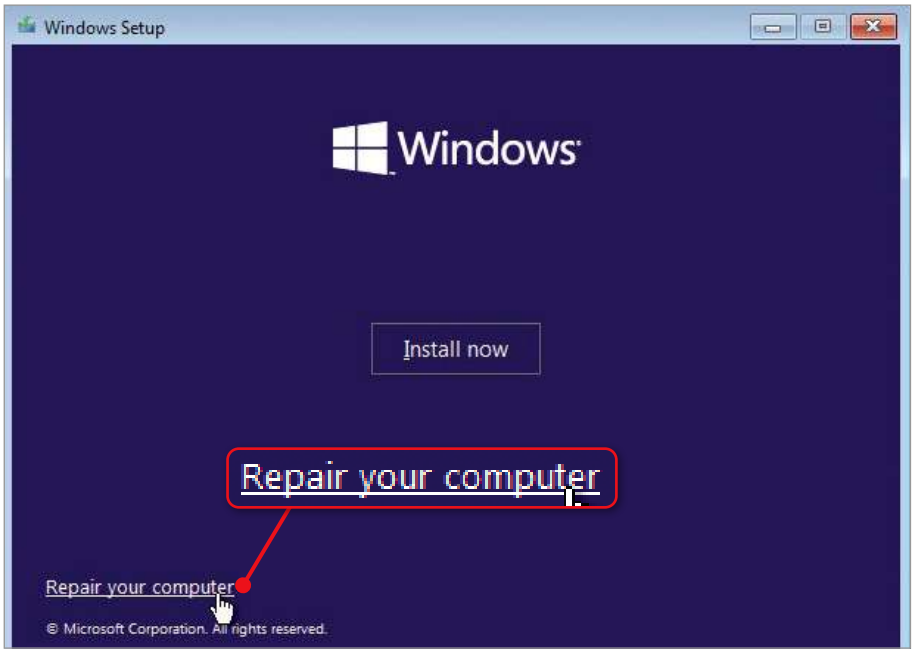
A It sounds like the laptop is launching straight into its BIOS, probably because it can't find Windows. This could be either a hardware or software glitch.

First, in the BIOS, look for a section labelled Boot or Storage, or similar, and check to see whether the SSD is still listed and at the top of the boot order. Use the cursor (arrow) keys to navigate, and press Enter to select.

If your SSD doesn't appear, or is already at the top, the drive could be corrupted. As your data is on the second drive, you could use Microsoft's free media-creation tool to create a USB recovery stick. It's a free download from www.snipca.com/55895.

Boot the laptop from the USB stick and, after the first window, ignore the Install Now button and instead click the 'Repair your computer' link (see screenshot below). Now just follow the onscreen prompts to see if the tool can get your laptop's copy of Windows back on its feet.

If not, repeat these steps and instead this time click the Install Now button to install a fresh copy of Windows. This will wipe all your customisations and so forth but it'll let you get the data stored on the second drive.



Click this link in Microsoft's free media-creation tool to create a USB recovery stick

Q: How do I completely wipe my dead iPad?

A: Issue 694, page 67 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

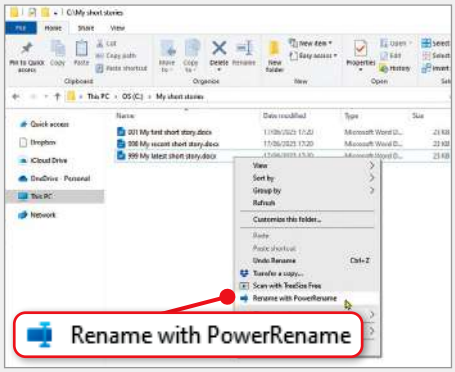
Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

How can I change hundreds of file names in one go?

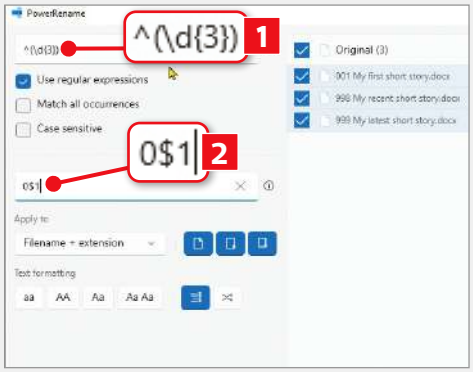
Q As a prolific writer of short stories, I now have 917 of them numbered consecutively from 001–917. As I'm fast approaching my second thousand, I wonder if there's a way of adding an extra nought in front of the file names of these stories so that they can be numbered 0001–0917.

It would take me an age to do it one by one, so I'd appreciate any advice on whether I can do the whole lot in bulk. Meantime, thanks for a great magazine! I learn something new from every issue.

Carl Hughes



Right-click one of your files and choose 'Rename with PowerRename'



Type these regular expressions into the search and replace boxes

A You can do this with the PowerRename component of Microsoft PowerToys (a free download from www.snipca.com/55899).

First, press Windows key+E to open File Explorer, then select all the relevant files. Next, right-click and choose 'Rename with PowerRename' (see screenshot above).

In PowerRename, tick the 'Use regular expressions' box and then, in the search box, type `^(\d{3})` (1 in our screenshot above right). Microsoft provides more detailed advice on using these regular expressions at www.snipca.com/55900, but what `^(\d{3})` does is tell PowerName to act on file names starting with exactly three digits: the `^` means start of the line, while `\d{3}` specifies exactly three digits. Putting all this in brackets 'captures' them so they can be reused.

That's necessary for the regular expression you need to type in the replace box, which is `0$1` 2. The `$1` refers back to the original captured digits, while the `0` is what you want PowerRename to place in front of them.

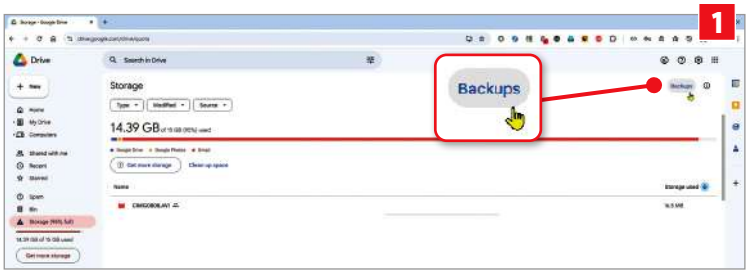
With these two expressions entered, the preview in PowerRename's right-hand pane should show what the new file names will look like. If all appear as you want, click Apply to rename them all.

How do I manage my Android phone's backups?

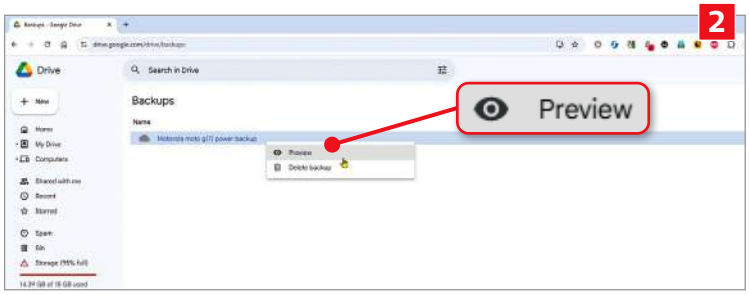
Q I've had a basic Android phone for quite a long time and it's probably years out of date now, but it does what little I need of it. Recently, while exploring its settings, I noticed that it's set to back itself up every day. That's surely a good thing, though I don't remember setting this up.

As such, I'm curious as to where this backup goes? How do I find out where it's stored and how much space it's taking up? And how would I ever restore it, if needed?

Matthew Hendon



In your Google Drive account click Storage then Backups...



...then click an entry in the list and choose Preview

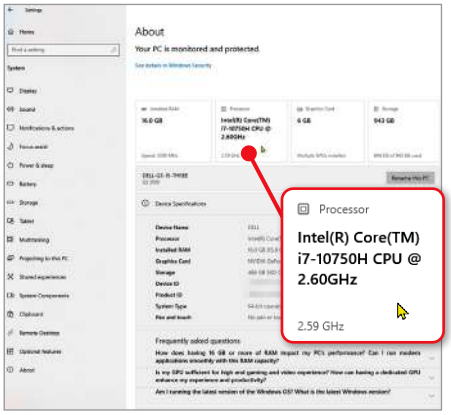
A We don't know your phone's make or model but almost all Android phones will be tied to a Google account – so that's where the backups will be stored. The account information should be visible within the System section of Settings, under Backup.

You can also use a standard web browser to check everything, by logging into the associated account's Google Drive at https://drive.google.com. There, on the left, click Storage and then – near the top right – click Backups (see screenshot 1). Click any entry in the list (there might be only one), then choose Preview 2. You'll now see details of the backup, including the space it takes up. Clicking 'Delete backup' here will remove the selected entry.

Restoring an Android backup is an option that's offered when setting up a new phone or cleaning an existing one to configure it from scratch. During setup, log in with the relevant Google account and you'll see the option to restore from a backup.

Can I fit a TPM chip into my old laptop to make it compatible with Windows 11?

TPM chips, like this NewHail model, are available on Amazon for around £20



To check which CPU your machine has installed, click System in the Quick Link menu then look under Processor

Q My Windows 10 PC is six years old. It doesn't currently comply with the requirements for Windows 11. I've noticed in the motherboard's manual that it has a slot marked TPM, but no chip is fitted. Compatible TPM chips are available on Amazon for around £20 (such as the NewHail TPM2.0 Module from www.snipca.com/56007, pictured above right).

I was wondering – would it be possible to fit one of these in the hope that it makes my PC compatible? And if I'm then able to update to Windows 11, will I lose all my files and programs in the process?

John Speak

A In answer to your first question – it's possible but not certain. That's because Windows 11 demands more than just the presence of a TPM chip – your computer's processor must also be deemed compatible.

Windows 11 requires an eighth-generation Intel processor – or AMD equivalent – or later. At six years old, your PC will be right on the cusp of the crossover between the seventh and eighth generations.

Your best bet is to check your PC's processor against Microsoft's Windows 11-compatibility list at www.snipca.com/55901. To find your machine's CPU, first press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu, then click System and look under Processor (see screenshot above).

There are a handful of other requirements, such as the need to have Secure Boot enabled (a six-year-old PC should support this). Check the rest of the requirements on Microsoft's website at www.snipca.com/55896.

In answer to your second question, upgrading from Windows 10 to Window 11 does not mean losing any personal files or folders, though it's possible some older apps might not be fully compatible.

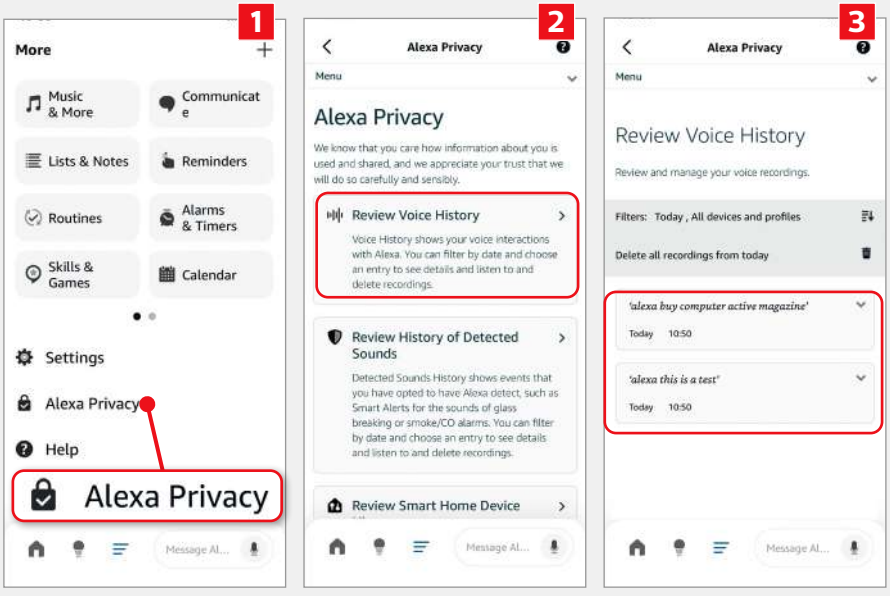
Why does Alexa respond when I haven't said anything?

Q I have an Amazon Echo Dot in my kitchen, which I mainly use as a radio and for cooking timers. I like it, but I've noticed that it sometimes reacts when I've not said anything. Do you know what might be causing this?

Steve Denton

A This is a common annoyance of smart speakers like the Echo, because by design they're constantly listening for their 'wake word' – 'Alexa' in your case. Kitchens in particular can be quite noisy, especially when pots and pans are bubbling and lids rattling, so that could be part of the problem.

You can actually check what the speaker is responding to by opening the Alexa app you used to set it up. First, tap the more button (three horizontal lines), then tap Alexa Privacy (see screenshot 1). Next, tap Review Voice History 2. You'll now see a list of entries showing what your Echo thinks it heard 3. To see what was actually said, or at least what triggered the interaction, tap the relevant entry then tap the small playback icon.


1
More
Music & More
Communicate
Lists & Notes
Reminders
Routines
Alarms & Timers
Skills & Games
Calendar
Settings
Alexa Privacy
Help
Alexa Privacy
2
Alexa Privacy
Menu
Alexa Privacy
We know that you care how information about you is used and shared, and we appreciate your trust that we will do so carefully and sensibly.
Review Voice History
Voice History shows your voice interactions with Alexa. You can filter by date and choose an entry to see details and listen to and delete recordings.
Review History of Detected Sounds
Detected Sounds History shows events that you have opted to have Alexa detect, such as Smart Alerts for the sounds of glass breaking or smoke/CO alarms. You can filter by date and choose an entry to see details and listen to and delete recordings.
Review Smart Home Device
3
Alexa Privacy
Menu
Review Voice History
Review and manage your voice recordings.
Filters: Today , All devices and profiles
Delete all recordings from today
'alexa buy computer active magazine'
Today 10:50
'alexa this is a test'
Today 10:50

Follow these steps in the Alexa app to find out what your smart speaker has heard

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

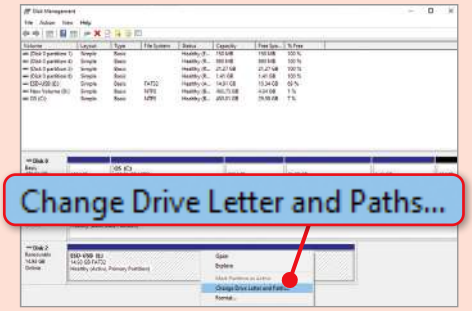
Drive letters in Windows?

Q The hard drive in my Windows desktop PC's has been assigned the letter C, while my USB stick appears as E in File Explorer. On my laptop, the same stick appears as D. Why is this? And what happened to A and B for that matter? Why do these letters differ depending on what I plug in and where?

Keith Wainwright

A The reason modern Windows computers use the letter C for the main drive dates back to the dawn of PCs in the early 1980s. The first IBM PC had just a single floppy- disk drive, which was assigned A. Dual-floppy models also existed with the second drive labelled B.

Hard drives weren't standard issue initially, but if one was added it would be assigned the letter C. By the mid-1980s a typical PC might have had two floppy-disk drives and one hard drive – respectively assigned A, B and C.



Re-assign drive letters in Windows using Disk Management

Fast-forward a couple of decades and floppy drives were approaching obsolescence. However, the original lettering convention remained – and persists to this day. In theory, today a PC's hard drive could be assigned any letter, but Windows prevents the use of A and B for the primary drive because it could create a lot of compatibility problems: there's simply too much software that expects the primary hard drive to be C.

Now, when you plug in a USB stick or other external drive, Windows assigns it the next available letter. In a desktop PC this will typically be E, because D might be a DVD drive, say, or a second hard drive or a recovery partition on the primary drive.

Windows also 'remembers' previous devices and their letters: that's why the same USB stick might appear as E on your desktop PC but D when plugged into your laptop. On another PC entirely, it could be F or G – or any other letter.

You can change drive letters to make them consistent across your devices. To do this, press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu, then choose Disk Management. Now right-click the relevant drive or partition before choosing 'Change Drive Letter and Paths' (see screenshot), then the Change button.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Why are my desktop icons muddled up after startup?

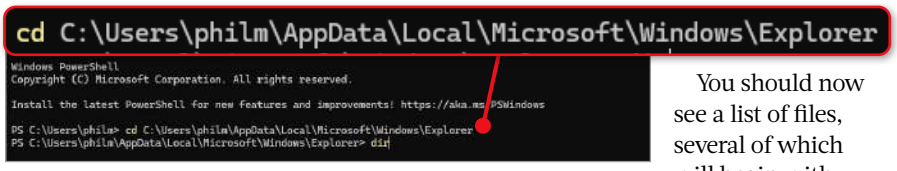
Q Can you help me unscramble my Windows 10 PC? Every time I switch it on, all my icons are clustered together in the centre of the screen – and I have to reorganise my desktop all over again.

It started doing this some months ago, after an update I think. Can you help with a fix? I read something about editing the Windows registry, but it looked difficult. For context, I also have two laptops running the very same software that don't have this problem.

Peter Conway

A This is a well-known Windows quirk. However, it's not always clear what triggers this glitch, but Windows updates are certainly on the list of potential culprits.

To fix it, first try right-clicking a blank area of your Windows desktop before hovering over View in the context menu. Now check that either 'Auto arrange icons' or 'Align icons to grid' is ticked – or both, if you want it arranged that way.


cd C:\Users\philm\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Explorer
Windows PowerShell
Copyright (C) Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
Install the latest PowerShell for new features and improvements! https://aka.ms/PSWindows
PS C:\Users\philm> cd C:\Users\philm\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Explorer
PS C:\Users\philm\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Explorer> dir

Force Windows to recreate a corrupted icons cache by typing this command into PowerShell

If that doesn't help, it's likely that Windows' icon cache has become corrupted. Deleting the associated files forces Windows to recreate the cache from scratch at the next restart, which should fix the problem.

To do this, press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu, then choose 'Windows PowerShell (Admin)' or 'Terminal (Admin)'. At the command prompt, type cd C:\Users\YourUserName\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Explorer (see screenshot) replacing YourUserName with your Windows user name – so cd C:\Users\Peter\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Explorer, for example. Press Enter, then type dir and press Enter again.

You should now see a list of files, several of which will begin with 'iconcache'. All of these need deleting. To do this, type del iconcache* (including the asterisk) and press Enter. Finally, restart your PC.

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 8 Oct

- How do I sync my Google Calender with Outlook?
- Will a Wi-Fi extender help with streaming?
- Can I make Quicken print? ...And many more

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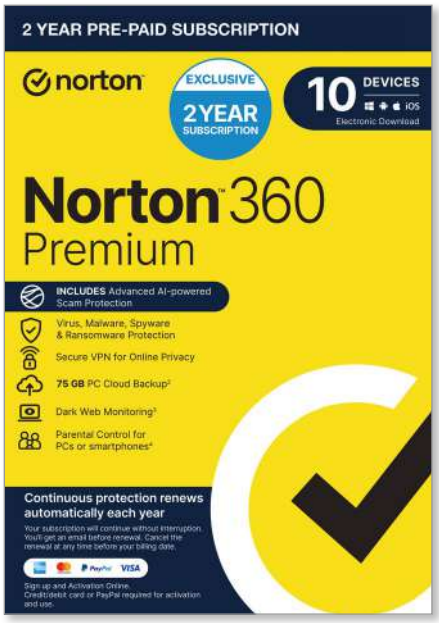

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Why won't my Windows 11 laptop show my USB stick?

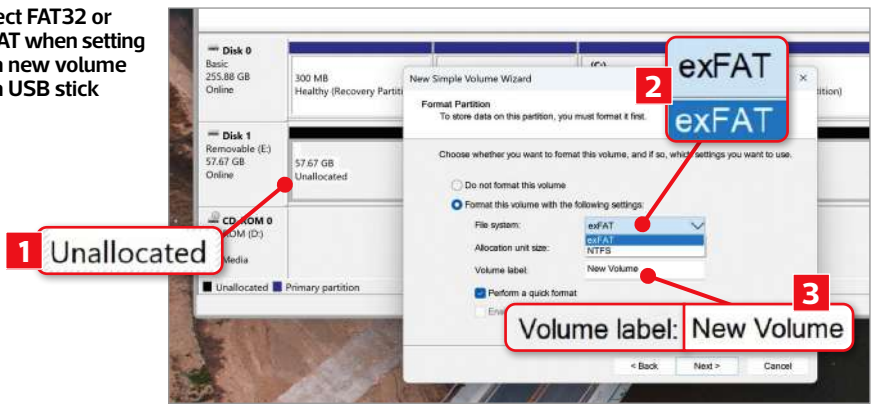
Q I successfully installed Linux Zorin (https://zorin.com) on my computer via a USB stick as a replacement for Windows 10, following reader Fraser Drummond's tip (Issue 714, page 41). My problem is that my Windows 11 laptop no longer shows my memory stick as a drive, so I can't format it or use it to store or transmit files. Is there a way to remedy this?

Lionel Gray

A This is probably happening because Windows can't read the drive, as it has been formatted using Linux file systems for the Zorin installation. You can solve this by plugging the drive into your Windows 11 PC, then right-clicking Start and selecting Disk Management. In the window that opens, look for the memory stick in the lower section – you should be able to identify it by its capacity, and it should be listed as 'Removeable'.

You may need to delete any existing partitions on the stick (right-click each one, then select Delete Volume). When the drive is shown as 'Unallocated' (1 in our screenshot below), right-click it and select New Simple Volume and follow the instructions, assigning a drive letter and choosing a file system as prompted – FAT32 or exFAT 2 are the best for most users because they work across most systems, including Linux.

Now give the drive a name (next to 'Volume label' 3) and continue. When you reach the end of the instructions, click Finish. Bear in mind that this process will erase any data currently stored on your drive.



Select FAT32 or exFAT when setting up a new volume on a USB stick

What's the URL for Digital Shield browser extension?

Q I liked the sound of the browser extension Digital Shield, which can prevent websites tracking you (Issue 717, page 42). But I couldn't see a URL for it in your recommendation. I could search for it online, but I'm wary of malicious copycat tools in search results. Is there a URL you can provide?

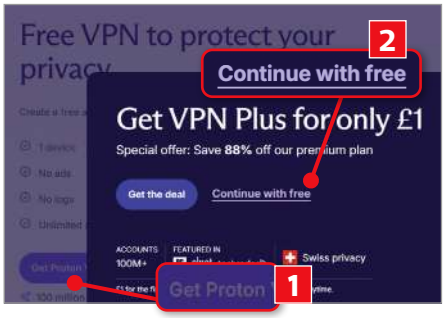
Richard Llewellyn

A Apologies, we accidentally left it out. You can install Digital Shield from www.snipca.com/56083 – just click the 'Add to' button in the top-right corner.

What's the URL for Proton's free VPN?

Q I'm keen to try the free version of Proton VPN, which you mention on page 52 of Issue 717's Cover Feature on VPNs. But the URL you gave (www.protonvpn.com) seems to go only to the paid-for version. Is there a direct link to the free edition instead?

Eamonn Lynch



Click 'Get Proton VPN free' then 'Continue with free'

A Yes, you can get straight to the free version of Proton VPN via www.snipca.com/56084. Click the purple 'Get Proton VPN free' button (1 in our screenshot, partially obscured) then 'Continue with free' 2.

Were your car Wi-Fi sums wrong for Netgear's mobile router?

Q In Issue 716's feature 'Use Wi-Fi in your car' (page 61) you say that O2's deal for the Netgear Nighthawk M6 mobile router (pictured right) would cost £504 over a 36-month contract. Surely six months at £21 and 30 months at £28 is £966? This is hardly the bargain you suggest, even after allowing for 40GB monthly data.

Ray Magill

The Netgear Nighthawk M6 router accounts for £13.97 of your monthly mobile broadband fee, according to O2's breakdown

A The £504 price we quoted in Issue 716 is based on O2's own price breakdown for the contract. According to O2, the Netgear Nighthawk M6 mobile router accounts for £13.97 of the total monthly fee over the entire 36-month period. The rest of the monthly fee covers the mobile broadband itself. Apologies for not making that clearer.

Jargon Buster

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

404 error Also called a 'Not Found' error, it means a web server can't show the web page you requested – often because the URL is wrong.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

AAC Advanced Audio Coding. A type of music file.

Augmented reality Lets you view the real world on a screen and add virtual elements.

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions are often released so problems can be ironed out.

BIOS Basic Input-Output System. Software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Bitrate A measure of data transfer speed, or of the quality of digital video or audio files.

Bloatware Unwanted software built into a new device.

Bot Automated software designed to perform specific tasks.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

CPU Central Processing Unit. Another term for a PC processor.

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country. The most popular is Bitcoin.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

Digital signature A block of scrambled data that can be used to verify the sender of an email.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

DRM Digital Rights Management. Software that limits the copying of a file.

Dual-SIM A phone that holds two SIM cards, letting you use services from two different networks.

Dynamic refresh rate Adjusts the refresh rate according to what's shown on screen, slowing down for static images to save power.

Encode Convert media files to a new format, such as WAV to MP3.

eSIM A virtual SIM card that's built into a phone, making it easier to change network.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

exFAT Extended File Allocation Table. Microsoft's file system for USB sticks and SD cards.

FAST Free Ad-Supported Streaming Television. TV channels that stream content online for free but are supported by advertisements.

FAT32 An old system used for formatting hard drives, and still used for some portable drives.

Fingerprinting A tracking method used by websites to identify you from the device and software you're using.

FLAC Free Lossless Audio Codec. A type of digital audio file that can be created from CD with no loss of audio quality.

Geo-restricted Content such as TV programmes and films that's intended to be watched only in a specific country. Much US-made content can't be legally watched outside the US, for example.

GHz Gigahertz. A measure of how many instructions a chip can process per second. 1GHz is equal to 1,000MHz.

GPU Graphics Processor Unit. A chip designed to create 3D graphics, but which can also be used for other computing tasks.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

Hash Used in encryption to turn a string of data into another string that is unique. You can't work out the original string from the new one.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

Heatsink A block of metal used to help dissipate the heat from a computer chip.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet, either free or for a fee.

HTTP Hyper Text Transfer Protocol. The technology that sends data between your browser and the web.

HTTPS Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure. The secure version of HTTP.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours than monitors that do not use this technology.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras. Some image quality is lost with each save.

Kill switch Quickly shuts down a device or app to stop it working, usually for safety or security.

Large language model A type of artificial intelligence algorithm that analyses huge amounts of data sets to summarise and create content.

Latency A measure of the delay in exchanging data between devices and web servers and on networks.

Launcher An app that changes how the Android home screen looks and works, especially for managing and opening apps.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

Lossless Music file formats that take up more space but provide higher sound quality.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

MP3 A type of digital audio file often used on music players.

MP4 A type of digital movie file often used for portable players.

M4P Apple's DRM file format for music bought from its iTunes Store before 2009.

Noise cancellation Method for reducing unwanted sound by adding a second sound specifically designed to cancel the first.

NPU Neural processing unit. Specialised chip designed for performing AI tasks.

OCuLink Connectivity standard that allows high-speed data transfers between devices using PCI Express.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

Phishing A form of internet fraud that tries to trick you into revealing personal details.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software or to your web browser.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

Qi Pronounced 'chee', it's the main standard for wireless charging.

QR code Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on. The more memory your PC has, the more tasks it can process simultaneously.

Read To access data saved on a computer.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Roaming charge Fee incurred for using your phone to receive data through overseas mobile networks.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

Secure Boot A security standard designed to make sure your PC avoids malware when booting.

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones. The SIM card carries the user's identity and phone number for accessing the network.

Sound driver Cone-shaped part of the speaker that converts audio signals into sound waves.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

Thunderbolt A very fast port for connecting external storage to a computer.

TOPS Trillion operations per second. A measure of a PC's processing power when performing AI tasks.

TPM A chip that stores keys which encrypt data on your hard drive.

Transition A way of joining two video clips together or moving from one clip to another. Common examples include wipes, dissolves and cutting to black.

Tri-band A router that broadcasts on three radio bands – 2.4GHz, 5GHz and 6GHz.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user. For example, a code sent to your phone in addition to a password.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2/4.0 Faster successors to USB.

USB-A The original type of USB connector, released in 1996.

USB-C A connector that's reversible.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WAV file An audio file, used for recording music and other sounds to disk.

Widget A small program such as a calendar that runs on the Windows desktop.

Wi-Fi 5 A standard for wireless networks that allows for much higher transfer speeds than 802.11n.

Wi-Fi 7 Faster successor to Wi-Fi 6, with an estimated maximum speed of around 46Gbps.

WMA Windows Media Audio, an audio format created by Microsoft.

Write Save data to a hard drive.

Broadband Deals

	Provider	Package Name	Monthly Price	Contract Length	Broadband Speed	Reward*	First-year Cost*
1	plusnet	Full Fibre 145	£24.99 £28.99 from 31st March 2026	24 Months	145Mbps avg. speed	£150 Gift Card	CHEAPEST £173.88
2	vodafone	Full Fibre 150	£26.00 £29.00 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	150Mbps avg. speed	£145 Gift Card	£182.00
3	BeeBu.	Full Fibre 500	£26.49 £29.49 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	500Mbps avg. speed	£100 Gift Card	£232.88
4	3	5G Hub	£17.00 £19.00 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	150Mbps avg. speed	N/a	£214.00

Go to www.snipca.com/55902 for full details

* Payments based on 12x monthly cost (including price rise) minus reward value
*Reward subject to change. Available as of 11th September 2025.

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Easy when you

Know How

Looking for a lazy way to turn his bedroom light on and off, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Create a smart light switch

Although I write about technology for a living, I have so far resisted the urge to turn my humble flat into a smart home. I own several smart gadgets – phone, TV, speaker – but I haven't invested in a smart heating or lighting system that would raise my home's status from semi- to fully smart.

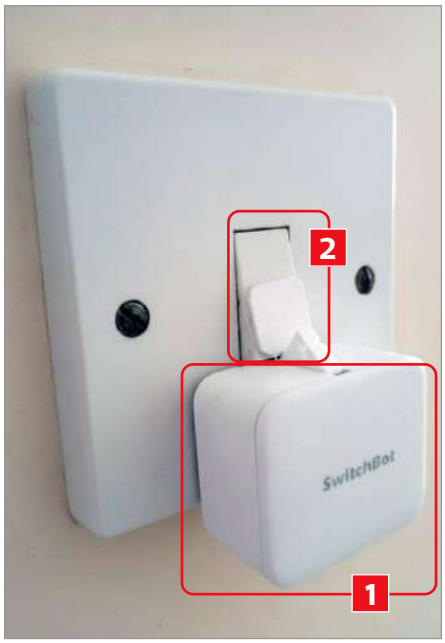
So I was interested to read about a device called the SwitchBot Bot (www.snipca.com/56136), which "makes any switch smarter in seconds". It's particularly good at flicking light switches, using a mechanical finger you control with an app on your phone. Now it's getting darker earlier, this sounded like the ideal lazy way to turn my bedroom light on and off.

Ignoring its silly name, which brought to mind the tongue-twister 'How much wood would a woodchuck chuck', I bought a SwitchBot Bot from Amazon (www.snipca.com/56138). It cost £26.99 with a £3 discount, though I noted you need a SwitchBot Hub (sold separately, priced from £36) for advanced features such as remote access and voice control using Alexa, Google Assistant or Siri.

I'm not a big fan of talking to gadgets so this didn't put me off, and the SwitchBot Bot arrived two days later. The tiny device was about the size (24x42x36mm) of a chunk of vanilla fudge but it felt reassuringly sturdy.

Following the instructions carefully, I removed the sticky plastic label that was protecting the case. I then scanned the QR code to install the SwitchBot app on my Android phone (there's also an app for iOS).

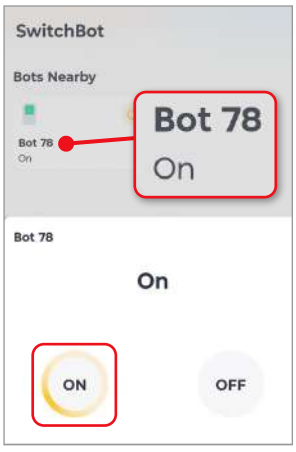
I switched on Bluetooth, tapped 'Set up now' in the app and allowed SwitchBot to find nearby devices. I then granted it access to my location and it immediately found the Bot, which it labelled Bot 78. I pressed the power button on the Bot's tile and the little robot finger on the device moved down and back up again.



Robert used SwitchBot Bot to turn his bedroom light on and off without touching it

So at least I knew the SwitchBot Bot worked, but would it be able to turn on a light switch and how would it turn the light off again? I could see how the finger would push the bottom half of a switch down, but not how it would pull it back up. The instructions said to change from Press Mode to Switch Mode to push and pull switches, so I activated this in the app's settings.

I was now ready to attach the SwitchBot Bot to a light switch and test its button-operating abilities. I watched a YouTube tutorial (www.snipca.com/56143) for guidance, as SwitchBot's own instructions were frustratingly vague.



Robert used the SwitchBot app to control the mechanical finger on the device

> "The tiny device was no bigger than a chunk of vanilla fudge, but felt reassuringly sturdy"

With the bot set to Off, I attached one of the supplied accessories – a tiny sticky pad on a plastic loop – to the gap in its finger. I then uncovered the adhesive tape on the back of the main device and stuck the SwitchBot Bot to the faceplate of my bedroom light switch, directly below the 'rocker' (1 in our photo above left).

Next, I removed the accessory pad's label and stuck it to the bottom half of the rocker switch, which was in the 'off' position 2. I returned to the SwitchBot app and pressed the On button for Bot 78 (see screenshot below left).

After a few seconds, the mechanical finger pushed down and my bedroom light switched on. I pressed Off in the app and the finger pulled up, bringing the pad with it and turning the light off. Success!

As mentioned earlier, to control the SwitchBot Bot remotely you need the SwitchBot Hub but I managed to switch the light on and off from my living room, which was still within Bluetooth range. You may think the truly smart thing to do would be to save money and press the switch with your own finger, but where's the fun in that?

Need help setting up your smart-home system? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries a Linux version of Windows 11

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